

Two Factions, Alike in Dignity

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/11096310) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/11096310>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	Major Character Death , Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	The Transformers (IDW Generation One)
Relationship:	Megatron/Rodimus Prime , Hot Rod/Megatron , Drift Deadlock & Rodimus , Megatronus/Solus
Character:	Drift Deadlock , Hot Rod Rodimus Rodimus Prime , Megatron (Transformers) , Ultra Magnus , Optimus Prime , Starscream (Transformers) , Skywarp (Transformers) , Thundercracker (Transformers)
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe , Romeo and Juliet AU , Happy Ending , Religious Content , Reincarnation , Everyone Gets A Sword , No Guns , Sticky Sexual Interfacing , Love at First Sight , Fake Character Death , Dancing , Past Relationship(s) , Implied Megastar - Freeform , Implied/Referenced Suicide , Painful Sex , Don't worry it's just Hot Rod being dumb, but im tagging just in case , Fingering , Size Difference , Wakes & Funerals , Transformers Spark Bonds , Spark Merging
Stats:	Published: 2017-06-05 Completed: 2017-11-17 Chapters: 25/25 Words: 83820

Two Factions, Alike in Dignity

by [starvonnie](#)

Summary

Autobot and Decepticon. The next in line to be Prime, and the leader of the rebel movement. One night, they meet and fall in love. Now, they must choose between their relationship and the destinies laid out before them.

Please keep in mind that this is VERY LOOSELY based on Romeo and Juliet, so I've used a lot of creative liberty. Neither Megatron or Hot Rod adhere strictly to either role, and many characters from the original play have been combined into a single character or completely eliminated. Also keep in mind the the Major Character Death warning is NOT for Megatron and Hot Rod. They will survive to the end, but others will DIE.

I'm gifting this to GunTotingScienceNerd since it was her idea in the first place so blame her for all the tears you will shed.

Notes

Everyone is gonna talk all flowery-like because I said so.

Also! I would like to thank my wonderful datemate Roddy for beta'ing this!

Chapter 1

"A Prime does not slouch!" Drift boomed in a mocking Optimus voice. No one could ever truly emulate the deep, scolding tone that his mentor did, but they tried. Over time it became a game that they played, meant to lift Hot Rod's spirits where Optimus attempted to bring them down.

"A Prime also doesn't swear or drink or do anything fun." Hot Rod rolled his optics as he deepened his slouch. He'd slouch the slouchiest slouch whenever he damn well pleased-- *and* he'd finish the bottle of engex Drift had brought him-- straight *from* the bottle, no less. He bet if Primes did drink engex, they'd have to use a glass. This way he broke the rules no matter what.

Who knew how much longer he'd be able to do that.

Laughing, Drift nudged him playfully with his pede. "I'm just teasing."

"I will miss your teasing. I will miss *you*." Hot Rod put the bottle down. Normally drowning his sorrows was an easy task with Drift's ability to acquire engex. Lately, he needed more and more of the stuff. Today his tanks had less energon than engex, and yet his worries still persisted.

"Did you think you would get rid of me so easily?" Drift shifted on the couch until he could lay his helm in Hot Rod's lap. On a day where Hot Rod's processor weren't so preoccupied, he might stroke his finials, calming them both. A lazier day. One where Hot Rod felt free of his worries. Today, though, Hot Rod pushed him away and stood. "Are you really going to let this separate us?"

"You speak as though I have a choice." Hot Rod busied himself by hiding the rest of the bottle behind some mess even Ultra Magnus wouldn't dare touch. He left it behind a closed door, though, to allow the mech to live in ignorance of his lack of cleanliness.

"Does your link to Primus sever your link to us mere mortals? To your amica? To life itself?" Drift stood but did not pursue him, though his field still reached for him. Trepidation stopped it just short of Hot Rod's, where on another day it would broach deep into it.

Just barely looking at him, Hot Rod murmured, "You know that your title will be rendered null by the ceremony. And you should know that the knowledge grips my spark as it grips yours, but there is no stopping that force."

"Only because you let it!"

"Drift!" After one deep ventilation, Hot Rod had calmed his anger-- one of the few changes Optimus had brought upon his life that he actually appreciated. His life was all the better now that he was able to control his outbursts, or at least nip them in the bud.

"Life is out *there*, Drift," Hot Rod lamented. He crossed to the window, casting a grieving look at the cape that hung nearby. A deep red, flowing thing, embroidered with gold. It was beautiful, regal, and represented everything wrong with his life. "Not in here. Not with me."

Now, overlooking the little Autobot sanctuary, he saw all manner of bots below. Smiling, laughing, being themselves. *Allowed* to be out and enjoying the sun. Even now, Hot Rod was breaking a rule by having Drift with him, and he had no doubt that he was breaking many more. An endless cycle of rule breaking. Each one followed by the stern look of disapproval from Optimus, and if was unlucky, one from Ultra Magnus as well. Sometimes he'd even be gifted an hour-long lecture about how his rule-breaking could have caused some cataclysmic event.

Hot Rod sighed. "There's no life in here."

"Hey! I'm in here." Drift smiled at him, but it fell away when Hot Rod turned his dull gaze back to him for just a moment, before his depressed optics found the outside again. "It won't be so bad. Does the law not become your own once the Matrix is bonded to you?"

"In a way." He could push open the door and step onto the balcony. Could feel what sunlight found him there. But what point was there when the sunlight chose him, rather than he choosing the sunlight? And what if he grew addicted to the feeling? Then it would be stripped from him, too. Already he felt naked. Once he was a Prime, there would be a new meaning to naked, or else he would have to find a more aggressive word to replace it so that his past self may not have lied about his feelings. "A Prime is not a god."

"Then why do you act as if Optimus is one?"

Hot Rod should not have offered him a glance, but a glance he gave him. More often than not, Drift pointed out things that Hot Rod didn't want to hear. Unlike Optimus or Ultra Magnus, he always spoke absolute truths. He was like a sentient mirror.

Hot Rod traced a finger along the window's edge, pushing the door open just enough to let in the slightest of breezes. Even that was enough to alight his senses. Too much. He let it close again, resigning himself to the stale air of the indoors. His home. His *prison*.

"I want to go back to before the war," Hot Rod thought aloud, barely audible, but Drift's audials were better than most. He had no doubts that he was listening to his lamenting. "Back to Nyon. Back to when I truly felt free."

"The war cannot be undone."

Turning to look at his amica, he saw his optics cast down. The blue light they emitted was barely visible. As quickly as his sudden dip had come, he bounced right back, standing and joining Hot Rod at the window.

"I think you need to have a little fun," Drift said. "Like, say, a party?" He wrapped an arm around his shoulder, steering him away from the window. "If you have to give up your freedom, then give it up with a *bang*. And maybe someone *to* bang, while you have the chance."

"Right. Like Optimus is going to let me go to a party. Let alone let me leave with anyone."

"You misunderstand." Blue optics twinkled with mischief. Hot Rod would let him do the same, if every endeavour weren't hopeless and counterproductive. Still, though, he let Drift speak his mind, even if it was a waste of time. "This is a party that neither Optimus nor Magnus will be aware of. All we must do to get you there is ensure that *they* will be unaware of you, as well."

Hope more often than not proved to be fruitless. A waste in the same way that most of life seemed to be a waste. If not a waste to his destiny, then to any other purpose he may serve on this planet. So foreboding. So many ways for him to bring ruin, if not simply by letting the Decepticons win. His time as a Prime would forever be a stain on their legacy if he allowed them to win.

Never had Hot Rod seen the ferocity of battle. Soon after the war had begun, he had been found on the outskirts of Nyon-- a town untouched by the reaching grasp of Decepticon hands. At least, not while Hot Rod had called himself a resident of such a place. But found, he had been, found and told of his destiny. How he had come to Optimus in a dream. A fireball to light the Autobot way and to bring fire to their enemies. The enemies of Cybertron. Those who sought to destroy their way of

life.

Unbeknownst to Optimus, Hot Rod had once been touched by Decepticons. One in particular, actually. For some time before that fateful encounter, Hot Rod had dreamt of Megatron. Infrequent, but so vivid that he could recall them to this very day.

Nothing stood out about them. Nothing strange or something Hot Rod could call remarkable. He had just been... there. Standing and looking at him. The ruby red optics that he recognized in the war footage Optimus had shown him sometime later. The contented look had been replaced by ferocity in the videos, but he knew they were his.

The last one-- the one that Hot Rod found himself thinking about more than he cared to admit-- had Megatron walking towards him. His slow steps took up the entirety of his dream, and it seemed as if the stretch of road beneath them extended the closer he got. And then he did something that would have struck Hot Rod as out of character for him had he known him through Optimus' tales before that: he held out his hand. The optics he'd seen many a time grew soft in their fondness, while his mouth formed the smallest of smiles. Small, but there.

Hot Rod woke up before he had a chance to accept or reject the offer.

Not once had he told Optimus of such dreams, or anyone, for that matter. Better to keep them to himself, he thought. Especially since he hadn't been visited by the Decepticon warlord since Optimus had picked him up, a formidable force in tow. It's procedure, they had told him when he asked why so many had come. It was not as if it were his place to refuse the request of a Prime, nor his destiny, but he would be lying if he said intimidation had no part in why he had agreed to leave with him that day.

Soon he would be tasked to lead their forces. *Optimus'* forces. For while he wore their insignia on his chest, he felt no connection to it, nor did he feel he had earned it. Nothing in his short life had mattered. And a short life it was, comparatively speaking. His spark, however, felt as old as time itself. It felt as if it threatened to give out at any moment.

Hot Rod glanced once more at the cape. At his destiny. Or perhaps it was to give out in a few days' time, under the weight of Primus.

No. Hope was a foolish feeling at best. At worst, it could bring about his soul's end when the hope served to fail him. But as old as he felt, his spark was still as naive as ever. And so, the hope took to it, bringing his spoiler halves up to the sky.

"What sort of party?"

"One with many eligible bachelors in attendance, none of whom you have met before." Drift took him up in his arms and spun him around as though they were at a ball and he were the prince wooing his paramour. "And with but one change to your appearance, you can be there. Where you can dance the night away--"

"Or at least the evening," Hot Rod grumbled.

"--and drink to your spark's content. You can do everything you've been told you shouldn't do. If you must abstain yourself from so much of life, then first you must experience such things. So go. Let your processor swim with ideas a little too brash for the sober. Allow the hands of bots you may never see again fall upon your frame. Enjoy your youth, Hot Rod!" Drift spun him out, leaving him on the precipice of his grip and then spinning him back in just before he lost his footing. Much of what Drift did had him feeling this way. Just toeing the line that would send him spinning out of

control and toppling everything Optimus had made him into. It both terrified and thrilled him.

"The light of my youth fades with every passing moment," Hot Rod said. The deep dip Drift put him in had his sagging spoiler grazing the floor. "I feel as though a Prime isn't allowed to be young. We are sparked old."

Drift scoffed. "Your destiny has made you boring." He brought Hot Rod vertical again, releasing him. "If the ancients truly believe that you shouldn't go to this party, wouldn't they put a stop to it?"

"They did. They sent Magnus."

Drift laughed as he leaned on Hot Rod's desk and crossed his arms. "Did Magnus stop me?"

"You climbed in through the window."

"Ah, but did anything stop me from climbing in the window? Could I not say that it was fate that I should climb through that window?"

Hot Rod let out a sigh that deflated his whole frame, falling back upon his berth. "I am a destined Prime. And while for many years I was unaware of such facts, facts they remain. I came to Optimus in a dream, and in reality he came to me. When my time in this life grows dim, another will come to me, and then I to them. Destiny, otherwise, has no place in my, or your, life."

Drift shrugged. "Then should destiny care if you have a little fun?" Hot Rod could feel his smug field from here. "If your destiny is truly to be a Prime, then everything else in life is your choice. You can either sit in your room and watch as life passes around you, drowning in your sorrows at the loss of your freedom, or you can take this and join in what you watch pass by."

Curious, Hot Rod propped himself up on his elbows to spy what Drift was holding. At first he saw purple, and then that purple took meaning. He sat up, and then stood, but he stayed put otherwise, as though the trinket had some hold over him.

"Where did you get that?" Hot Rod asked, a little mystified. It looked like the genuine article. It bore the scars of battle; its points bent and a single deep cut nearly splitting it in two. Rust crept in on a couple of edges. A testament to the passage of time and improper care. Whoever had worn it must be long gone. Even after death rust did not begin to form so quickly on Cybertronians.

Drift shrugged. "My old badge. I saw no reason to rid myself of it when Autobots do not trust me regardless. That, and I admit, just in case I ever desire to return to their folds."

Hot Rod stared at Drift with a look that bordered on grief.

"I wear the brand of your brethren only to seek sanctuary here," Drift went on. He solemnly removed his Autobot badge, giving it a forlorn look. "I am not a true member of either cause, as I have seen their similarities. To choose one side would be to also, in some ways, choose the other. By choosing neither, I subscribe to neither of their extremes."

"I wasn't really given a choice." Hot Rod looked down at his own emblem for only a moment. Not once had he removed it since Optimus had placed it upon his chest. Removing it could prove to be the sacrilege that would denounce him of his Prime-hood. And while the idea of being a Prime terrified him, having to relearn the rules of this new world and find his new place was a reoccurrence in his nightmares. "But if you had to pick a side. *Truly* pick a side. Which would you choose? Would you return to the Decepticons? Make an enemy of me?"

"If ever I were denied sanctuary here, and forced to choose..." With slow steps, Drift approached

him, holding the Decepticon symbol before him. Upon reaching him, he plucked the Autobot brand from Hot Rod's chest, and with it a gasp from his vents. Then he attached the Decepticon symbol, and it felt wrong, but he couldn't decide if that was because of what it symbolized, or because it was simply change. "I would leave. For an Autobot denying someone sanctuary goes against what they claim to stand for. And that would be the true similarity. For both causes to have strayed from their intent. And in that future, would they both become irrelevant."

"But if you *had* to."

Drift sighed and gave Hot Rod a tired look. The same look he gave his pristine Autobot symbol as he put it back where it belonged. "I cannot answer these questions for you, Hot Rod. But perhaps this party may give you the insight you wish. As all in attendance fly under the opposite of the binary flag both teams are so eager to fly. And besides all that, perhaps you may find yourself a fling that would really have you chastised were it found out."

"I don't think a fling is for me."

"That's the beauty of *this*." A finger pointed to his new allegiance. "You won't be Hot Rod there. You'll be..." The gears turned in Drift's mind as he thought. "Spin Out. I knew a few 'cons by that name. But if you have a proper fling, neither of you need to know the others' name." The lewd smile Drift gave him told him that he had done the things he was suggesting his amica do. "Now, a name and a faction to match are all well and good, and absolutely necessary, but very few Decepticons share a certain... attribute."

Hot Rod cocked his helm as Drift reached for him, his fingers delicately stroked the fragile plating around his optics. Only then did he understand.

"But... your optics--"

"Cosmetic surgery," Drift explained. "I found that it was easier for Autobots to accept my switch if they didn't have 'Decepticon' optics staring them down. Now. Do you still have that kit I bought you?"

Hot Rod nodded enthusiastically. The excitement at *finally* having an excuse to mess around with what was in that kit has his spoiler flapping.

Drift laughed as he walked back over to Hot Rod's desk and pulled open a drawer. Digging through the mess of things Hot Rod couldn't decide on a home for, he found the kit. A relic from before the war. A little thing Drift picked up by chance at a store that somehow still ran even with the threat of Megatron's tyranny.

The red optics of the lower castes, designed for working underground and in industrial settings, and for much cheaper than their blue counterparts, took to Megatron's lead. The split wasn't perfect, of course, and there were some who did not fit the binary, but the majority formed a stereotype. A stereotype that was hard to break from, as Drift had found.

Before the war, however, the bots who could afford to (and had the want to do so) would sometimes play around with the colour of their optics and biolights. Their methods were much more sophisticated than the sets of lenses and sheets of colour filters for biolights, but they would do for a night.

Hot Rod couldn't help but feel a little sad that he wasn't going to be trying them out with his amica. He had always imagined them going to some bar done up in new paintjobs with matching optics and biolights. They would dance the night away, completely free of their past selves and futures, if just

for a night. But now there were only a few days left, and the future he wanted to escape was too close to run from. He felt it at his back, just scratching with claws that would soon find purchase on his plating.

"Look up at me," Drift instructed, a red lens balanced on his fingertip. "Keep your optics wide and don't blink."

Hot Rod held his ventilations as he did as he was told. It felt like there was more to this than just a change in appearance. Like accepting the red was equal to accepting the badge on his chest and the ideals that came with it.

He blinked once they were in, *hating* how they initially felt. This was why fashion-forward upper caste members had colour-changing optics installed. To avoid the scraping feeling on sensitive components.

"You'll get used to them," Drift promised. "Let them settle."

And settle they did, after a while, but Hot Rod kept up the frequent blinking for a while longer. "Won't they notice an imposter?"

Drift laughed. "If you keep blinking like that, of course." He gave Hot Rod a more sympathetic look when his amica scowled at him. "Don't worry. They'll all be overcharged. That, and too busy trying to find someone to bring home to notice any oddities in your appearance. Now, go and enjoy the last wisps of freedom that Primus has given you."

"Can't we just... sneak off for a drink again?" Hot Rod hit him with his best pleading look. "I would be delighted to spend every last hour I can with you. I want you to remember me even if I don't remember you."

Drift crossed his arms, trying to conceal the pain and anger on his face.

"I'm not saying I *will* forget you, but..." Hot Rod pulled Drift in for a hug that he didn't reciprocate. No blame passed through his field. If it were Hot Rod, there would have been far more screaming and angered words tossed this way and that. All a cover-up for how his spark constricted tighter in his chest as each new morning came. If it weren't for Drift, all he would have known of this sanctuary were the only other two mechs who spoke little more than a few words to him or gave him a humble nod. He would only know of his room and the temple. "I want to promise that I won't forget you, but breaking that promise would be far worse than admitting that I truly have no idea what will happen to me after I take the Oath." He tightened his hold on him, burrowing into his neck. If nothing else, he would remember his scent. Perhaps that would trigger a memory after the ceremony. "At least by admitting this now, I can comfort you."

When Drift had finished his sigh, he felt like half of his weight had gone with it. But a new weight, his arms, settled around Hot Rod. "I'll make you remember me one way or another. If that means befriending Rodimus Prime, then so be it."

Hot Rod grit his denta but kept his discomfort from hearing his to-be name to himself. At least it wasn't falling from Magnus' glossa while he reprimanded him, for once.

"It was fate that we met," Hot Rod murmured. "Surely it must be fate that we stay together."

Pulling back enough to look his amica in the optic, and his own had a bittersweet sparkle to them, he said, "You decide your own fate."

"To a point."

"If you want to remember me, you have to make sure that I am on your processor."

"Drift, I can't just--" Hot Rod tried to put Drift at arm's length, but the result was more of a shove than anything. He took a harsh ventilation in, huffing it out all at once. Taking a few steps away from his amica, and feeling his pain even without a bond, he said much more levelly, "I don't know what's going to happen after I become a Prime. They have told me many things, but much is speculation. Every Prime's experience is different from the last. Some can hardly be recognized from the mech they were before, I just..." He glanced back at his amica. "I don't want to get your hopes up."

"No one and nothing could change my Hot Rod." Drift's optics still glowed dimly, but a smile curled the corners of his mouth up. He rested a hand on his face, that Hot Rod gladly leaned into. "Not even the holiest of calls."

Hot Rod slipped his fingers in between Drift's, ensuring that his hand would stay cupping his cheek. "I am the farthest thing from a Prime that I have ever seen. If the bond does not change me, my new title certainly will."

"Only if you *let it*."

"I don't want to let it, but I have no--"

"I was once a Decepticon." Drift let his thumb trace circles on Hot Rod's cheek. "And now I'm not. I chose a different path, and you can, too."

"You think I can just tell them I don't want to be a Prime? Just--"

"Hush..." A couple of fingers sliding up Hot Rod's finials had him closing his optics with a soft sigh. "Hush. Your Primehood is not something you can simply deny, but a leader is not a position filled by a mech formed from the same sentio metallico. One style of leadership is no better than another. I have seen you take charge when the situation calls for it. I have seen you do great things. I believe, no, I *know*, in my spark, that the reign of Rodimus Prime will be remembered for all of time."

"Please don't call me that." Hot Rod pried Drift's hand off of his face, but kept a light hold of it, only a few fingers caught in his grasp.

"I apologize."

"No, it's... I only get to be Hot Rod for a little while longer, y'know?"

"Of course." Drift reaffirmed his grip on Hot Rod's hand, giving it a squeeze. "And know that I will address you however you wish to be addressed. Prime or no."

Hot Rod smiled a wobbly smile and lightly bonked his forehead against Drift's. "Thank you, Drift. A Prime couldn't ask for a better amica."

Chuckling, Drift said, "Then I suppose you'll just have to remember me."

Rolling his optics, Hot Rod let a sigh slip from his vents, ending on a smile. "Alright, Drift, you win. The sky could fall and I would still remember you. I *will* remember you. If not by face or name, then by the warmth that radiates through my field when you are near." He pet one of his finials. "By the way your nose scrunches when someone does this. And the way you always smile afterwards."

"Does that mean I have your permission to force you to do this if you do forget?"

Hot Rod slid his hand down to Drift's cheek, cupping it. "Whatever it takes."

"Alright." Drift took a hold of the hand Hot Rod had on him. "We have the rest of eternity to mourn the passing of Hot Rod. Tonight, you are going to *celebrate* everything Hot Rod is. Tonight, you will be someone else, so that the real Hot Rod may shine through, even if it is just for an evening." He pulled him across the room.

"Will you be coming with me?"

"You are venturing where I cannot follow." Drift threw one leg over the balcony railing with practised ease. "I will take you as far as you can, but there are many Decepticons who would do me harm if given the chance."

Hot Rod resisted when Drift tried to continue to lead him. "Is this a good idea?"

"Are any of our ideas ever 'good?'"

"What if they find out I'm an Autobot?"

"But you aren't really, are you?" Drift's optics sparkled with mischief as he released Hot Rod's hand in favour of the railing, swinging his other leg over. "And as I said, they will have other things on their processor, or if they've had enough to drink, nothing on their processors at all." He started to climb down. "You've never seen a Decepticon in your short life, which means none of them have seen *you*. As long as you don't announce who you are, you are guaranteed to have the last great night of your life before Rodimus becomes your everything."

After escaping the Sanctuary, they assumed their alt modes and drove off into what Hot Rod assumed was nowhere. For a while he was correct. Nothing but rust and the skeletons of what may have been buildings once, or perhaps they were naturally occurring formations that had the unfortunate fate of resembling ruins.

Then came the light. At first, Hot Rod had thought that they had chased the setting sun and forced it to rise once more, but the light was the bright white light of a city. Kaon. The city where Megatron made his name. Where he made his start. Where the very first flickers of war licked at the kindling of unrest and grew into the roaring and uncontrollable thing it had become. The very reason for the Sanctuary they both called home stood a modest drive's away. Which begged the question: was Megatron unaware of its existence, or had he simply allowed it to exist?

"I can't go any further." Drift slowed to a stop, and Hot Rod stopped too, but he skidded instead, sliding a half circle until he was grill-to-grill with his amica.

"You're sure you can't come with me?"

Drift gave a snort of laughter. "I'm sure Megatron would be more than happy to see me," he said sarcastically, "but no, this is where I must leave you. But you needn't worry. The hall isn't far, and no Decepticon will recognize you."

"But--"

"Continue driving until you come upon Kaon. Find the black pyramid-- you can't miss it. It's visible from almost anywhere in the city. Find it, then find the fortress beside it. It will be a newer structure than the rest. About the only one free from the creeping rust that threatens to consume the once-beautiful city. You will know you're in the right place when the walls can barely contain the music inside. There will likely be bots outside. They are not security. They have either stepped out for air or a cygar. Pay them no mind, and they will pay you as much. If you do not want to stand out, you must walk in there as if you belong. Because you do. You have as much right to be there as any Decepticon."

Hot Rod caught maybe half of that.

"Go." Drift nodded towards the city in his alt mode, tipping one side of his bumper lower than the other. "Enjoy the party."

"I can't do this." Hot Rod followed Drift as he turned around.

"You're going." Drift turned back just enough for Hot Rod to see a headlight. "I will push you into the city if I have to, but I doubt you would enjoy the confrontation that is sure to follow."

"Breaking rules is only fun when I'm with you."

"Then it's a good thing this night will be about more than just breaking rules."

Before Hot Rod could say another word more, Drift sped off and left him on the cusp of the middle of nowhere. He could catch up to him. Leave Kaon as a hazy glow in the dust he kicked up behind him. Leave the Hot Rod who used to go to parties at every chance he could, the one that everyone beyond Drift had spent years quashing, behind him, too. Everything he had been. Everything he *was*.

Transforming out of his alt mode, Hot Rod turned his helm. Towards Kaon. Towards the Sanctuary. Back to Kaon. Back to the Sanctuary. A thrill and a risk one way. His destiny the other. His boring. Laid-out. *Daunting* destiny.

One last night. One last chance.

Hot Rod plucked the Autobot symbol from his chest. Not attached enough to keep it but too scared of the consequences of abandoning it, he tucked it into his subspace. The points of the other one nearly cut him as he took that one out instead.

"Well, Spin Out," Hot Rod said to himself, wiping the symbol as though that would clean it of the dirt and rust, "time to see what you can do."

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

The pyramid Drift described would have disappeared against the inky sky if it weren't for the buildings around it. Like a triangular void sprung up from the ground, it twinkled with lights that mimicked stars, and stretched up so high that Hot Rod couldn't see the tip. The base, on the other hand, reflected back the pot lights lining the street surrounding it. They dazzled his optic sensors as he drove past them, and he would have missed the building he was searching for if it weren't for the loose congregation of bots outside and the melody escaping its walls. Just as Drift had described.

Skidding to a stop, and bringing far too much attention to himself, Hot Rod resumed his bot form, nearly tripping over his own pedes from the leftover momentum. Face a little flushed, Hot Rod brushed the dust from his chassis, avoiding optic contact, and made for the door.

He might have been given a few glances from the bots outside, their cygars glowing faintly as they languidly brought them to their lips, but he was too frightened to check. He kept his gaze forward like he belonged there. *Because you do*, he heard Drift's voice echo through his processor.

The emblem seemed to hum with Drift's life force on his chest, as if they were freshly bonded to each other. A fool's dream, but he was protecting him. Somehow. Somehow Drift was with him even when he couldn't be physically.

He walked past the quietly flirting bots with the fake confidence of a mech entering the party with an entourage, and they paid him no mind. Too focused on the light touches on arm, wing, and thigh. Enraptured by the whispered promises of what was to come after the party, or perhaps sooner if their EM fields continued to pull at one another as they were.

Would Hot Rod be able to let loose as they had? Could he even entertain the idea of going to berth with a Decepticon?

The engex already in his system helped to quiet his nerves as he pushed open those huge double doors, though there was not enough distilled on this planet to calm him. His spark pounded faster than the thumping beat of the music he let out of the hall. It rattled his plating and set his sensornet alight with a strangely pleasant tingling. It left him feeling a little dizzy, and he took light steps towards the balcony railing so he could catch himself before he toppled into the frenzy below.

The first thing Hot Rod noticed when as he came out of that blissful haze was that he was horribly underdressed. And by that, he meant that he wasn't dressed at all. Apart from his new Decepticon emblem. The second thing he noticed, was that there were a lot more Decepticons than he thought there were.

A whole sea of them spread out below him on the dance floor, with rivers and creeks up the stairs and down hallways. They spilled in and out of elevators and up onto the stage, so mixed up that it was nigh impossible to tell the talent from the guests.

The music made waves among the crowd. The tide would ebb and flow during each change of song, and the sea would become a turbulent storm when the masses approved of the song selection.

At any other party, Hot Rod would have made a beeline to where the action was. He would push past bots and duck under arms until he was the centre of attention; all optics on him as he made

waves of his own with his frame. Not tonight, though. Tonight he must be as average as any of these other... well, they all looked extraordinary next to him. Which meant that he stood out like a miracle flame still burning at the top of a pile of sinking debris.

Making his way down the stairs and into the fray, he pretended to rub an optic, checking that the lenses were still in place. Losing a lens would out him, and turn the twinkling red towards him. As long as they stayed put, he should pass as a foot soldier. Though now, among the regalia and jewels that shimmered and gleamed, he found himself of dull plating waxed days ago, and as naked as he could be without revealing his spark. A spark that threatened to reveal itself by beating out of his chest.

Hot Rod vowed to never assume anything about the Decepticons ever again. From what he had heard, he should have blended in just fine. His wheels might draw an optic or two, but other grounders milled about the mansion, though most preferred tank treads to wheels.

Wings, though. They reigned supreme. Hot Rod would not have been shocked to learn that every seeker on Cybertron were there. It sure seemed that way. Regalia and delicate chains draped from each wingtip and tailfin, dotted with jewels and striped with chrome. Somehow they never tangled with any of the other partygoers, nor their partners who got much closer. Even when said partners toyed with it, tugging on the clips that had them gasping from such sensitive components being stimulated. Some seemed on the verge of interfacing right then and there; hidden, and perhaps exhilarated by, the throng.

Hot Rod felt ghosting touches on his spoiler. Almost every second fingers would caress him, but every time he turned to look he found no one even looking his way. The phenomenon left him confused, and worse, a little charged up. Could they smell the ozone on him? Did he *want* them to?

Either way, the music got to him. Right down to his circuits, where the music changed from sound to a feeling, and that feeling flowed back out of him in the form of dance. He dragged his hands up his frame until they were above his helm and rocked his frame this way and that.

Stranger's hands replaced his own. Up and around his waist. Across his spoiler and some even daring to stroke the curve of his aft. He tried to catch the optics of whoever was brave enough for that, to smack them away or perhaps to get more acquainted. He'd decide once he caught sight of them. But they always managed to flit out of sight or pull their hand away before he could catch the colour of it.

The thrill of it all made his spark race more than it ever had.

At some point he'd been handed a drink. He neither saw the bot who gave it to him nor did he notice it until it was to his lips, the engex sweet on his glossa.

Deep in enemy territory-- about as deep as anyone could get-- he should have feared for what might be in it, but he found himself lifting it to his mouth again and again until the last drops either found their way into his intake or down his front. Buzzing and dizzy and spinning and dancing...

What a beautiful world.

Try as he might to stay near the edges, he found himself where he always found himself at a party: right smack in the middle of the dance floor. Which wouldn't have been the worst predicament to get himself into, if the band performing hadn't decided that then was the time to slow things down.

Every Decepticon seemed to suddenly have a partner, pairing off as though it were a practiced routine. If he didn't stand out before, then he certainly did now.

As the first few chords were struck, Hot Rod tried to shove his way to the edge to join the other wallflowers. To find the bar, maybe. A second drink might rid him of this anxiety.

Someone stopped him from getting much further.

"You're a long way from home aren't you?"

Hot Rod found himself caught up in another's arms. Only once they had done a few spins did he realize that he was dancing with none other than *Megatron, himself!* A hand more gentle than he would have pegged him for sat upon his waist, while the other held his hand with the promise of strength that was restrained. There was a small smile on his face as he twirled him around the dance floor. All manner of colours but Autobot red stirred around him. His Decepticon badge seemed to burn the more he was moved about, mixed in and brushing the shoulders of his enemies, none the wiser of his presence.

While Megatron wore no fabric, on his helm, a crown of amethyst crystals, and his frame sparkled with jewels the colour of the night sky. The onyx and obsidian were placed far more tastefully than the rest of the attendees. If one only gave him a glance, they would think his face naked of make-up, but the spinning changed the light at every moment. Every so often it caught the iridescent lines of silver that were carefully hidden over his regular grey plating. Still every bit as threatening, even with his shimmering silhouette and hint of a smile so similar to his dream.

After a far too lengthy silence, Hot Rod realized that the warlord was waiting for an answer.

"N-not so far," Hot Rod managed to get out. He managed a small smile, too. One even smaller than Megatron's, and yet his cheeks still hurt.

"No?" Megatron leaned forward a little, forcing Hot Rod to lean back. "And where do you hail from?"

What was he to say? In Drift's and his minimal planning, he hadn't considered a back story. He had assumed none would care to ask. If he agreed and named some far off city, he might be quizzed on a place he had no memories of. If he corrected him and told the mech who was much bigger from the inside of his EM field that he was of Kaon, would he not open himself up to more scrutiny?

In the end, the truth won out.

"Nyon."

"Hm." Megatron seemed perfectly fine to continue this dance that consisted of little but twirling and swirling with no breaks. Hot Rod, however, felt queasy and dizzy. As if the room was spinning with them. "While I know my ranks are numerous, I remember faces more than names. Yet yours is still unfamiliar. So I ask you, whom of Nyon do I speak to? Whom of Nyon do I hold close in my arms?" At the word "close" Megatron pulled him just a bit closer. Air still left a buffer between their frames, but it was a fraction of what had been there to start. Hot Rod felt his plating prickle with something like trepidation-- or was it anticipation?

"Spin Out." Confidence managed to keep his tone light and raise his shoulders and spoiler back to a normal height. At least Drift had the sense to give him a name. Generic enough for there to be multiple bots with this name.

"Hmm..."

The same disapproving look that Ultra Magnus gave him whenever Hot Rod answered a question incorrectly now found its home on the face of his so-called enemy. Though instead of the underlying

disappointment, there was now a sense of distrust. Someone who hadn't endured years of discerning Ultra Magnus' *wide* range of facial expressions, he might have missed it.

"And how long do you wish to continue this poorly planned charade?"

"Ch-charade?" And though it might spell death for him, Hot Rod turned his helm to both sides, trying to spy an exit route, but they kept spinning and spinning. Everywhere and nowhere all at once.

"Please. I could tell that those were lenses from across the room." His thumb strayed near Hot Rod's optics, and they widened with fear despite his best efforts. He wouldn't leave this room alive if Megatron allowed the blue to show through, but his hand returned to his waist. Pulling him closer, even. "I admire all bravery. Even if it stems from a well of stupidity."

Hot Rod swallowed.

"Tell me, Autobot," his smile grew when Hot Rod's optics widened past the coverage of the lenses, "did you come here of your own free will, or was this a half-baked plan concocted by your superiors?"

Hot Rod flinched away from a seeker when the gossamer fabric hung from their wings tickled his spoiler. Unfortunately, that meant pressing himself closer to Megatron. He started to shake and pulled away again when their plating started to rattle together.

"Worry not, little one," Megatron purred. He reclosed the space Hot Rod had just made. Chest-to-chest. Or they would be, if they were of equal height. Instead, Hot Rod was awarded a close-up of his Decepticon brand. Battle scarred, the purple faded, but that night it had been polished to whatever shine it could still hold. It was both rougher and more beautiful than Hot Rod's. "If my troops cannot spot a spy among them, they do not deserve the glory of dismantling him."

Every word he spoke was smooth, and yet veiled a threat that he could not ignore.

"Who would get that honour, then?" Hot Rod's voice shook and then *cracked* despite his best efforts. "Uh, if there was a spy, of course?" He laughed it off, or tried to, anyways, and stuck his aft out in an attempt to be sexy. He had no delusions or even intentions of taking Megatron to berth, but a little flirting usually got him out of tough situations back in Nyon.

Megatron chuckled darkly, his hand sliding up Hot Rod's back to pull further at the arch. "That is usually an honour I reserve for myself."

Hot Rod swallowed.

"But it would be such a waste to ruin a night as enjoyable as this one, and a shame on any night to spill the energon of a mech as beautiful as you." Megatron abandoned their dance and Hot Rod's hand to tilt his chin up. Genuine red met fake, and Hot Rod found that it was easy to get lost in the real thing. "I could think of far better things to do with you than killing you."

Chapter End Notes

I warn you guys now: Megatron is mega super ultra gay.

Chapter 3

Hot Rod didn't have even a moment to wonder whether he should or even wanted to ask what he meant by that when the music picked up once more and the crowd around them erupted into another frenzy. He could understand how a mech his size could get caught up in the chaos, but to lose Megatron in the fray would forever be a mystery to him. Relief and a strange twinge of loss came over him, but soon enough another glass of energon seemed to materialize in his hand and it softened the edges of life.

He was bumped and shoved and stroked and caressed from every side. Hands materialized out of nowhere, striped with metallic paint and shimmering jewels, to reach for him. But even surrounded by all manner of bots, most of them apparently quite willing to touch him, none felt quite as nice as those that took up nearly half of his back. Gentle in their strength and set on their intentions. Nothing like the fingers that found him now, stroking and pricking at whatever they could come into contact with.

Hot Rod fled the dance floor as quickly as someone could while fighting a seemingly never-ending tide of intoxicated and dancing Decepticons. He took a moment to ventilate where the mass of frames thinned out, though the air was still thick with hot exvents and the heady smell of ozone.

He felt optics on him. Hopefully for his nakedness and not because the obvious Autobot aura Megatron had detected had grown strong enough for his subordinates to sniff him out as well. Thankfully, they looked away soon enough.

Quick pede steps, too quick to go unnoticed, brought Hot Rod back to the stairs he had come down. Tempted to take the stairs two at a time, but instead taking them normally, he arrived at the top to more weird looks and then a few stares that looked at anything but his face.

Something bigger than him stopped his escape to the exit. All of his life he would never know what force stopped him, or what made him turn around to look across to the other side of the ring of balconies. And there, directly across from him, was the ruby gaze of Megatron.

They locked optics. Hot Rod couldn't read his expression. A higher balcony doused him in shadows that he backed even further into, never breaking what turned into an intense stare.

Hot Rod found himself taking slow steps alongside the railing, his mouth opening a touch in wonder. No matter where he went, even when he had to step around a bot who wasn't aware that they were intruding on this very intimate encounter, the twin red points still found him. Still somehow wormed their way under his plating as if they stared at his very soul.

Only once he closed in on him did Megatron look away.

No longer under his gaze, Hot Rod should have run. Should have been able to leave. But his gravitational pull was strong, and like an asteroid doomed to burn up in a planet's atmosphere, he went to him, taking to a side perpendicular on the pillar Megatron casually leaned against.

Megatron made no acknowledgement of his presence beyond a smile, and even that could have been coincidental. Until he spoke, that is.

"You are as foolish as my troops. You should have left while you had the chance."

This time, Hot Rod didn't flinch at the gravelly tone. Instead, he reached around the pillar and tested his fingers against Megatron's. And there it was. The spark. Not brought of electricity or friction,

but by something unseen to any but them. One borne from each of the stars shining, unseen, in their chests. Joined for a moment by a touch so tender. Broken too quickly.

"I see that your paintjob is more than just an aesthetic choice." Again he felt the warlord's touch. The spark upgraded to a bolt that burst in Hot Rod's chest and tried to break free from its prison of metal. "You seem to enjoy playing with fire."

"You cannot warm yourself without the chance of getting burned."

"And burn you, I can." A flash of red peeked around the pillar. "Your fuel lines will take to the flame and leave nothing but charred remains if you choose to pursue me."

"I only pursue as you do."

A deep chuckle shook from his vents as Megatron's fingers found a more firm hold. "Do you presume to know how I pursue?"

"I do." Hot Rod passed a flirty look over his shoulder. He wished he knew how it looked in the red. Perhaps the lenses would stay longer than just this night. "But if I have assumed wrong, I would not be opposed to being set right."

"A touch of a hand is but a sparkling's love." Suddenly Megatron was above him. *Around* him. Hot Rod's world became a charred and scarred grey, littered with onyx and obsidian. His hand now furiously held, but without pain. The other above his helm; the ceiling of his trap. "Only a kiss can prove a grown mech's love, if he chooses to impart it. So I ask you, Autobot, do you think that is something I wish to impart on *you*?"

Hot Rod refused to falter. "I am of no use to you, and yet here I still stand, unharmed. Capable of extracting Decepticon secrets from those of less sober processors, and yet, here I still stand. If you wanted to do away with me it would have been done, my frame left to bleed out in the streets. And yet..." Hot Rod inched up onto the fore of his pedes as each brave word left his intake. "Here. I. Still. Stand."

Hot Rod's closed his optics, awed by the fireworks Megatron's lips brought to the pitch. Much softer, again, than he had expected. All those rough edges and sharp angles smoothed under a lover's touch. The touch that did not move beyond a hand nor lips, for while Hot Rod was no stranger, and nor did he fear playing with fire, it was only by knowing how far to reach into the flames did he know how not to get burned.

His fuel lines did take to the flame, though not as Megatron had anticipated. They were made of sterner stuff. Nourishing him with the fire, and satisfying a hunger Hot Rod had not been aware of until this moment, and now he craved more.

Wires, diodes, and transistors all charred with this newfound love, though not so much as to kill him, but rather, to excite him. In the same way Megatron's energon boiled from the charring of near-miss photon rounds, so did Hot Rod's from the flares of love.

Far too soon, the kiss ended, though the fire still roared. Still demanded kindling, and kindling Hot Rod sought again, somehow overcoming Megatron's great strength to pull him down, so their lips may join once more.

As their lips danced, so, too, did their frames. In a way not unlike their first meeting, they twirled and stepped and retreated further into the darkness lingering by the walls. They went as far from prying optics as they could get at the moment, so that none but them would know where Megatron's

hands roamed. Down his back and waist and across his spoiler, exciting him in a way he hadn't been excited in many years, and those encounters, even at their highlight, had not left him this giddy.

"An Autobot who can kiss," Megatron mused during their next parting. Fingers toyed with moist and plump lips that begged for more yet felt like they had received plenty. "Imagine that."

"I would have thought a Decepticon to be more brutish."

"Do you assume our kind to be brutish with those we wish to cherish?" Megatron almost sounded hurt. As hurt as someone could be with a smile on their face and a beautiful mech in their arms.

"Then I can presume that you wish to cherish me?"

"Cheeky little thing aren't you?" Megatron didn't give him the chance to say anything to that. He was on him again, pressing him closer to the wall, and closer to him. No matter how much space he took, there always seemed to be a little more for him to take the next time.

"You do not seem adverse to cheeky."

"Or perhaps the trait suits the mech, and the thing I am not adverse to is *you*."

Hot Rod let his cheekiness manifest into a smile. "So you admit it?"

"I am about to admit it again." The words barely made it out before he was on him again. Lips, hands, chassis; all found him. Pushing, pulling, and pressing. Filling an unending need he'd never known he had, and now couldn't live without.

Megatron left Hot Rod breathless as he paused their give-and-take once more. He had to refrain from clawing his back and pulling the warlord back in. A new addiction already sparked at the circuits in his processor, taking root in his very code and demanding he feed it.

How would he ever be able to go home after this?

"Now tell me the truth," Megatron's voice took on a sudden seriousness. "What is your name? For there is no bot who would decorate themselves as such without a name to marry it to."

Hot Rod sucked in a ventilation and bit his lip.

"Perhaps this will ease your fears..." Megatron stroked at his finials, and for a moment he assumed he'd meant that touch, but then he continued. "It is far easier for me to order a strike team to eliminate an Autobot that I can describe to them, rather than one I know the name of."

"Oh."

"Are you scared now?" Megatron cemented the grip on his waist. Still somehow gentle, though much firmer than any before it. "Have I finally struck fear into the spark of one fearless enough to traverse the very heart of enemy territory? Simply by asking him for his *name*?" He shook his helm a little, laughing as he stooped down once more.

Before he could reoccupy his lips, Hot Rod whispered, "Hot Rod of Nyon." It left his lips like the secret it was.

"There it is." Megatron smiled. "And I see that you were foolish enough to attempt crashing a party without the story to back it up. Not that your disguise is flawless. It is anything but. If you wish to attempt this again, I suggest darker colours."

Hot Rod cocked his helm, confused. Oranges and reds and yellows like the hues of his frame dotted the dance floor.

Megatron chuckled. "A shadow goes unnoticed while the sun draws attention." He slid a hand down his arm until he met with Hot Rod's hand, lifting it as if examining it. "If you wish to fit in, I could help you with that."

"Oh?" He cocked his helm the other way, trying to seem coy instead of confused but probably failing.

"Mhm..."

The shadowy corner Megatron had backed him into seemed far brighter once he pulled away. He didn't go very far, though. He still had a hold of his hand, giving it yet another strangely gentle tug. Everything Megatron had so far subjected him to had been gentle. How strange.

"It calls for a fair amount of trust," Megatron said. The next pull had Hot Rod's pedes moving to keep up. "Is it safe to assume I have that from you?"

Trust?

Hot Rod followed where he lead with no resistance, as if all his reservations had left his frame.

"You... have not given me a reason not to trust you yet," Hot Rod replied quietly after a pause, still trotting along.

Megatron chuckled darkly. "I see you failed to pay attention during Autobot history."

"I got the gist."

"What a brave thing you are." A glint of red showed as Megatron turned his helm back. "A very attractive quality."

"Yeah?"

Megatron made a sound of agreement. "Though you could be riddled with unattractive qualities and still be the most beautiful mech here."

Hot Rod found himself *giggling* of all things around the warlord. How he hadn't won the war by charm alone was beyond him. One flash of that smile had enough charisma to fell an entire Autobot fleet. A few words falling from that silver glossa and Optimus should have already signed a peace treaty.

Or perhaps he just saved it for the appropriate mech.

An uncontainable blush and smile spread across Hot Rod's face and he was sort of glad that Megatron was too busy navigating his way through the crowd to take notice. It also distracted him from the stares, sprinkled with a glare every now and then, from the Decepticons they passed. One in particular watched them go with so much hatred that, if Hot Rod had cared to notice him, he might have wondered what his problem was. He'd never met him before, and was too enchanted by the hand holding his and the thrill of the unknown to pay attention to such things.

He didn't know what waited beyond this crowd, or atop the highest stairway off of the ballroom that Megatron lead him up. A few hallways and then through a door, and Hot Rod was twirled into what he assumed was a massive berthroom, but he only got a quick and blurry glance before Megatron

dipped him into a kiss that left him dizzy in both spark and processor.

Here he demonstrated his strength. His hands still lay softly upon his plating, but he required only one arm to keep him aloft. The other was free to roam his frame; caressing all manner of plating. The lightness of his processor made every touch that much more tingly.

Megatron righted him, holding him once more as if he intended to dance with him again. The music did not reach them this far from the party, but Hot Rod wouldn't pass up another chance to be twirled about.

"You do not wear your sword," Hot Rod mused aloud after noticing it leaning against the wall. Never was he without it in all of the stories he had been told. *Millions* it had slain, or so he had been told.

"Are you saying I have reason to wear it?" Megatron gave it a slow glance before refocusing on Hot Rod. "Know of any delinquent Autobots that aren't in need of their arms?"

"N-no."

"You sound scared."

"I'm not!"

"You should be."

"But I'm not."

"You are shaking."

He was, wasn't he?

"Oh," Megatron's smile slowly curled on his face, "a naughty little Autobot, are you?"

And then his lips were on Hot Rod's neck and all he could do was claw at his back and gasp, shaking even more. Fear never once crossed his processor. It should have. He should be *terrified*. Fearing for his life. Even Drift would agree that this took his idea too far.

"Mm." Megatron hummed against his neck cables, stretched taut with Hot Rod's helm thrown back. Against his neck, he murmured, "Oh, how easy you have made it for me."

Hot Rod sucked in a quick ventilation in anticipation of the next kiss, but Megatron pulled away. Instead, he stroked the curve of Hot Rod's cheek.

"Someone else might take advantage of that," Megatron warned. "You are a brave and beautiful thing. You came here alone, I assume?"

Hot Rod considered that perhaps this was all part of his plan. Make him think that *he* was the angel among the demons. *Oh, yes, those other Decepticons would see harm come to you. Not I.* But at this point, did it matter?

"I will take your silence as a 'yes,'" Megatron assumed. He took a step away, drawing Hot Rod further into the room, toward the berth that matched the room for comparative size. Halfway there and Hot Rod started to get second thoughts, and then their route curved instead to a vanity table that sat beside a window that framed the city lights. They looked like a patch of twinkling stars.

"Let's help your beauty shine through," Megatron said gently, pulling out a stool for him. "Not that

you need it."

Hot Rod sat, his frame still light and bubbly even with the confused thoughts swirling through his processor. Every touch of the warlord's hand spread a bloom of warmth. Some petals touched; others succumbed to the frost of the rest of his plating. Though there were always more flowers to go around.

Megatron gave him a quick buff to start, all the while giving him flirtatious glances. It wasn't a stretch to assume that he was imagining more... scandalous things; Hot Rod swore there were twice as many unnecessary caresses to his frame than there were necessary ones. Not that he minded. Every stroke of his arms, spoiler, and once, his inner thigh (with a positively lewd look from mischievously glimmering crimson optics). His temporary lord was having far too much fun with this. Hot Rod was beginning to think this was more for Megatron's benefit than his own.

"You're not of this world, are you?" Megatron asked in all seriousness.

Hot Rod balked. "What? Like... a god or something?"

Megatron gave a snort of laughter. "I would have guessed an angel, but no. I was referring to the war." He teased the buffer's edge against Hot Rod's spoiler. "You clearly didn't buff before you came here, and yet you barely have a scratch on you. And no scars, as far as I can tell. You are an Autobot, but not an active one."

"I have scars!" Hot Rod lifted a leg indignantly, showcasing the one on his inner calf. "See?" he prompted once Megatron took a hold of it, kneeling before him.

"My mistake," Megatron apologized, turning Hot Rod into a pile of blushing mush when he lay a kiss over it, his hand stroking perhaps a bit too far north. "And tell me, Hot Rod, which battle did you receive this in?" He smiled up at him.

"Uh..."

"I cannot recall any Decepticon training where we teach our troops to aim for the inside of one leg." He kept smirking at him as he ran the buffer over it. Without the extra scratches around it, it hid among the grey plating. He might as well have been unscathed.

"Okay, yeah, I got it while racing." A new blush, this one from embarrassment, found his cheeks.

"Racing?" That quirked up an interested optic ridge. "Stationed with some Velocitronian recruits, perhaps?"

Hot Rod scoffed. "I wish. My life is far less enchanting than theirs." His optics turned wistful as he looked out over the city. What he would give for a similar view from his window.

"Recreational, then? Still an admirable pastime. Where do you like to race?"

"I used to, outside of Nyon. Just... anywhere. I would take anywhere, now."

"Oh?" The buffer stopped.

Suddenly Megatron's total attention made him feel exposed. Here he was, opening up to a total stranger. No, not even just a stranger, his *enemy*. Having this sort of conversation with any Decepticon, let alone Megatron, would have Magnus in a fit.

"I do not really have... *time*. Not anymore," Hot Rod replied carefully.

"So you *are* a new recruit?" Megatron asked.

Scoffing again, he grumbled, "No. I have been an Autobot for some time now. I am not sure if it suits me, or I it, but I kind of have to be."

Megatron buffed the remainder of Hot Rod's leg in silence, speaking only once he had his other ankle in hand. "My love for you is unwavering, regardless to which faction you proclaim to be a part of, but you are aware of other options, yes?"

Hot Rod laughed. "Trying to recruit me, are you?"

"A night into a lifetime." He finished the other leg, perhaps giving Hot Rod a few moments to mull his offer over. Then he slid his hand up Hot Rod's chest, settling near his Decepticon symbol while the buffer took to the other side. "You can have your own badge, rather than using the one you have clearly taken either willingly from a traitor, or stolen it from one who must be feeling quite naked by now. I am going to assume the former, as you do not strike me as the thieving type."

"Uh... yeah..." Why was he even answering his questions if Megatron could seemingly peer into his mind and learn whatever he pleased about him?

"Think it over. Few wise choices are made in mere minutes." Megatron plucked the symbol from his chest, holding it out to him. "See it returned to its proper owner. If they have not discarded it yet, they may wish to return to me, when I will decide if they are *permitted* return."

Hot Rod took it and deposited it in his subspace when Megatron paused his buffing.

"No one will be checking for badges," Megatron reassured him. "If they were, they would have already weeded you out before I ensnared you." He resumed the buffing, taking extra time right over his racing spark. He ruined the perfect finish with a kiss over his now-shiny chest. A tiny smudge amongst the perfection. Though Hot Rod would have him leave many more at the expense of a pristine waxing. "Gorgeous. Not that I ever had any doubts."

Hot Rod hid his once again reddening face behind his hands. If anything, when he reached back into his databanks to recall this night, it would be easier to remember when his face wasn't red. However, his hands just became another place for Megatron to lay his lips, and then back upon his cheeks when his curiosity got the best of him and he let his fingers slide away. Fingers Megatron was quick to entangle in his own in, making it impossible for Hot Rod to cover his face, and impossible for him to keep Megatron from ravaging it with as many kisses as he desired.

And warlords? They always wanted more.

Every bit of his cheeks received the same amount of love. Down his nose, with a lingering one left on the very tip. Across his forehead and down his jaw, until his mouth fell near his neck, and Hot Rod held his ventilations while Megatron's fell warm across sensitive cables and plating.

"Well..." Megatron's voice was suddenly low and growling. Predatory. Hot Rod waited with bated ventilations for his next move, not entirely sure which move he was hoping for.

Another kiss came Hot Rod's way. On his jaw again, rather than his neck.

"I have cleaned you up. Now it's time for the finishing touches that will make you even more the envy of every other..." He considered Hot Rod's blank chest. "... bot."

Much like the hidden silver on Megatron's face, the warlord applied gold in varying shades to his yellows and oranges. They lacked the time for jewel inlays, even though they always seemed to find

the time for more expressions of love. Though now Megatron had to be more careful, lest he smudge the paint. Each touch of fingertips ghosted as though they had never been there at all. Kisses were placed carefully on plating he was sure was clean. His ventilations, though. They left cool tracks where there was paint, coursing over his frame in pleasing stripes that had his own ventilations hitching.

"Beautiful," Megatron murmured again, though Hot Rod could have easily imagined it. His voice left him so softly from a frame that was anything but.

Hot Rod waited as Megatron disappeared behind him. The touch came after a drawer opened and closed. Not by a hand, not quite, but by a clip to his spoiler, followed by another on the other side. There was a certain sensuality to his hands as he did so. Not once had anyone ever touched his spoiler with such gentleness without the intent to interface with him.

Megatron encouraged Hot Rod to turn on the stool with a gentle nudge on his shoulder. The drapery clipped to him fluttered as he turned-- gold, he found. Embroidered with a red Decepticon symbol. Visible to all but himself, except for before the mirror.

Funny how it nearly matched his Autobot badge in colour. It did cross his mind that Megatron had no business owning such a garment, but it left to make room for the gravelly voice flowing into his audials.

"I figured this would be more to your liking," Megatron purred. "And it matches far better than what you had before."

Megatron circled him like a predator stalking his prey. If Hot Rod were inclined to feel like prey, he might feel threatened. And while his spark raced, it was with excitement rather than fear.

A tug on the fabric had Hot Rod's spoiler being tugged back, pulling a gasp from him, and then a hitch to his vents when his back met the warlord's front. He held the ventilation while Megatron stroked along the sensitive upper edge of his spoiler.

"I fear I have made you too beautiful," Megatron murmured right into Hot Rod's audial. And though he'd already done far too much, and he knew that he should shrink away, Hot Rod still found himself leaning into the embrace as Megatron wrapped his arms around him. "I do not want to give you back to the party now. I want you all to myself."

Hot Rod shivered as Megatron's ventilations tickled his audial. His hands worked lower and lower until Hot Rod considered that perhaps interfacing was indeed his end goal. But though his fingertips sometimes strayed to more suggestive areas, they never made it fully to his array.

"And I always get what I want."

"I am not denying you." Unhurried hands, striped with gold, reached up behind to find grey shoulders and helm. To which lips then found said fingers, kissing and even dragging one of the tips into his mouth, letting it leave with the teasing flick of a glossa.

While Hot Rod was a virgin to many things in life, sharing a berth was not one of those things. Even after everything any bot had ever done to him, that one move lit a fire in him like no other. So many sparks that night. So much kindling to nurture them to a full-on roar. He could practically hear the crackling. He certainly felt the heat.

"Would you give yourself to me so easily?" Again his hands stroked south, and again they parted to instead settle on thighs and hips. Innocent. Though, if Optimus or Magnus were to see them, they

would have other ideas.

Hot Rod turned his helm, surprised and delighted to find Megatron's so close. His optics flared with desire and dropped to his lips, and he only managed to stop himself from rejoining them for a moment.

The sparks settled in Hot Rod's chest, only to erupt into fireworks that had his frame arching to meet Megatron's mouth with greater ease. It wasn't long before he was turning to accept him fully, standing and kicking the stool aside. They had no use for things that only served to stand in the way of their love.

"What looks like ease to you--" Hot Rod's back hit the wall, knocking some air from his vents. The warlord was quick to steal the rest with a claiming kiss. After managing to bring new air in, Hot Rod was permitted time to speak again. "--is just a reaction to a mech who is saying all the right things." He had to rush to get the last words out before Megatron stole those, too. Decepticons were just like what he had been told. Always stealing.

Megatron hummed against his lips, like he wanted to speak but was already tasked with something far more important. Not that Hot Rod minded one bit. If anything, he was set on intensifying whatever was happening. His hands mapped out Megatron's frame. He searched every nook and cranny until he could make an exact replica of him from memory. It would be the closest he would get after this night.

Again, Megatron's hands neared very interesting areas, and once again, they retreated. This time, they dragged some regret back with them. If the feel of Megatron's mouth on his weren't something he would miss, and if he could even get his vocalizer to work, he might suggest they turn this dance in the direction of the berth.

Spark pounding even harder, Hot Rod let his hands fall further down Megatron's back. He lost the nerve before he got far, and then they slid back up to where they had been.

"Looking for something?" Megatron purred. He leaned down again to whisper in his audial, "Autobot?"

And something about the way he said it had Hot Rod melting in his arms. He would have fallen right to the floor if his arms weren't there, holding him firm.

"You can take what you like," Megatron went on. "Anything and everything, I will give to you."

Hot Rod's optics fluttered open, still hazy as they found Megatron's face, but they soon fell upon the clock behind him. The numbers meant nothing to him until they clicked in his processor, and that sent his spark racing in the worst way.

"Is that the time?!" Hot Rod slipped out of Megatron's arms. "I was expected back half an hour ago!" he explained quickly, shout-whispering profanities to himself and making a dash for the door. Before he could get far, Megatron caught his hand, smearing the gold as he pulled him back in for another kiss. Hot Rod's panic evaporated on those processor-wiping lips.

A stroke of gold brandished his cheek and neck as Megatron's fingers spread the paint around. Somehow it made its way to his lips, and he was left with golden kiss marks all over his face.

"I will come for you again." A threat? A promise? Either way, it was one Hot Rod would look forward to have him fulfilling.

One last kiss. One last, rushed, and yet somehow time-stopping, kiss. What Hot Rod wished could

have been his last sensation from the party. But there was still the flight of stairs back down, and fighting the crowd, showing no sign of dying down, let alone stopping. The fabric, and by extension, his spoiler, caught and was tugged this way and that, and yet somehow the delicate drapery never tore. By the time he made it back through the sea of frames, he had no doubts that other bots wore some of the paint Megatron had oh-so carefully decorated him with. It was so smeared and spread out on his plating that it was almost impossible to tell where it had been originally applied. And all the while, being pushed and bumped and even *stepped on*, he felt Megatron's optics on his back.

Hot Rod paused at the top of the steps by the entrance, right where he had paused when he had arrived, though then he had looked out of place. This time, he knew for certain that someone was looking at him. Even though Megatron had rejoined his troops, he still found the familiar crimson out of the other, now vastly different-looking, optics.

There was a fire in them. The same fire that no doubt burned in his own. Would it show through the lenses? And there was a yearning, too. To rejoin frame and lips and hands, to intertwine fingers. A yearning he desperately hoped he could answer.

A Decepticon watched him with longing. A Decepticon had ravished his frame. A Decepticon had left gold marks on his plating that would have to, regrettably, be washed away. Hot Rod's time as a Decepticon was drawing to a close, and his chest was naked of his true colours. So long as he wore red and Megatron violet, there was no future for them. Not even one more night. Not even one more *second*. But he took several more, cutting into his lateness. The reprimanding of Ultra Magnus grew sterner by the moment.

Optics wistful, Hot Rod whispered, "Meet me in the next life," before he tore his gaze away and ran from the party. He knew that if he walked, he wouldn't make it ten steps before he ran right back into those arms.

Chapter 4

The drive back to the sanctuary would have taken Optimus twice as long if a Prime truly wasn't supposed to go as fast as he said they should. If not for that, then for the fact that Optimus was far bulkier. Something he said Hot Rod had to look forward to. He wished he could have known what he looked like as Orion Pax. He quite liked the frame he had. And the paint job. Would he have to take on something more simple like Optimus? He thought he would know by now if that was the case, but there was so much to learn that he couldn't be sure if they had discussed it or not.

He'd break that rule when he got to it. Right then he had to focus on not breaking (or at least, not letting Ultra Magnus find out) his curfew. And while this was yet another un-discussed rule, Hot Rod doubted that scaling the building to his balcony was something a Prime did. Though the thought of Optimus trying to do the same had him snickering as he shut the doors softly behind him.

It was only once he turned and felt the fabric tickle his spoiler did he realize that he had been flying what was essentially a Decepticon flag and sneaking into an Autobot sanctuary. Thankfully, he had encountered no one as he skirted Kaon, and beyond the guards posted at the entrance, no one out and about. Not that they brought him any feeling of safety. If Hot Rod could climb out of the walls and back in undetected, so could someone who intended them harm. It was only by sheltering bots like Drift that they could even call this place a sanctuary. If the Decepticons were as ruthless and merciless as the stories said they were, and Hot Rod was beginning to doubt their validity, it was only a matter of time before they came here. And two (while, admittedly, formidable) bots standing at the door wouldn't save them.

Well, no one saw him. No harm done.

The fizzy feeling in his tank bubbled up to his spark and spread a wide smile across his face. He took a few free spins around his room, and then held his arms up as though he had a dance partner. Twirling and twirling until he felt dizzy and then slowing to a stop and taking a seat before his vanity table.

Gold made his plating sparkle, even in the low light. After switching on the one above his table, he was all the more radiant. Even smeared, it looked beautiful. And there was something to the lived-in look of this make-up. It had him bringing his hand to his face to spread the untouched lines over the silver of his face. He bit his lip to contain the joy that threatened to burst out his seams at any moment.

What a night. Drift was right. He really needed this one last night to be rebellious. To be free one last time. He made sure to make a back up of the data packs of this night. That way, when the pressures and stress of Primehood got to him, he could recall the time where he danced the night away, covered in gold.

Red optics, half-lidded and glowing like embers, made up quite a few memories. Those, he made double, sometimes triple copies, if the memory brought a gasp from his vents or a swell to his spark. A secret he would come to visit many a time. Whenever he needed to get lost for a minute or two... Or maybe right then...

Hot Rod couldn't hear his own wistful sigh over the pounding of his spark. Nor did he hear the approaching footsteps. He *did*, however, hear the angry knock of Ultra Magnus. The knock that was less of a request and more of a warning. He had *seconds*.

Hot Rod tore the regalia from his spoiler, and thankfully the fabric didn't rip, but that meant his

spoiler paid the price. Twin scrapes burned where the clips had sat, but he had no time to wallow in the pain. Regretfully, but also with no time to regret, he crumpled the thing up and tossed it to the far corner, where it was just hidden behind the chair that was sat there. The door was already opening when Hot Rod caught the flash of red in the mirror and had the sense to pry the lenses from his optics, which ended up on the floor and clearly in sight, but perhaps tiny enough to go unnoticed?

Ultra Magnus was already frowning before he got optics on Hot Rod, but no matter how deep his frown was, he could always look more disappointed.

"Is your chronometer malfunctioning?" Though Ultra Magnus asked it like a question, and left Hot Rod plenty of time to answer it, he knew it wasn't a question.

"I got absorbed in my uh..." He gestured to himself. "My make-up."

"Your make-up."

"Yeah."

"And you are wearing make-up," Ultra Magnus crossed his arms, "why?"

"I just, uh, wanted to feel pretty," Hot Rod lied. He picked at his hand, only serving to spread more of the gold.

The frown deepened.

"And I, uh... I wanted to try out some looks for the ceremony. I thought it might look good with the cape." He gestured to it, his optics moving from Magnus' face to the floor. "I am... not very good, it seems."

"And why did you think that testing out your make-up skills at this hour would be a good idea?" Ultra Magnus forced himself back into Hot Rod's vision by walking up to him. Still, Hot Rod's optics remained on his pedes. "If you truly want to be a Prime, you should be brushing up on your vows. If I recall, you still were not finished writing them?"

"They are almost done. I will have them done and memorized by the ceremony. I promise." Hot Rod's neck ached from the angle.

"See to it that you do. And wash up. A Prime is always in berth early so that he may rise early the next day." Ultra Magnus turned on his heel and made for the exit.

"Then maybe I shouldn't *be* a Prime," Hot Rod muttered to himself.

A stern look burned Hot Rod's way.

"I will clean myself up," Hot Rod told him. "And get right to berth."

"And there will be no yawning during the run-through tomorrow." Ultra Magnus let the door shut behind him.

Hot Rod made a rude gesture in his direction before angrily rushing into the washracks and scrubbing his plating raw, and he air dried after that. On the balcony. Just so it would take him that much longer to get into berth. That, and the sun had only set a few hours ago. Only bots who were too old to remember how old they were had turned in for the night. Except for Ultra Magnus, of course. Without him, who would tell Hot Rod what to do? He should be out with Drift. Anyone his age, really. Partying or just generally getting into mischief.

He sighed and leaned on the railing.

Neither of Cybertron's moons shone through the thick layer of clouds. Not the kind for acid rain, but the kind that made the world look grey and bleak. During the day, anyway. They only served to make the night darker. A perfect metaphor for what was going to be a horribly bleak life from here on out. Drift would argue that there was a lot one could do in... three days? Four? The day was coming whether or not he knew which one it was. Someone would be sure to remind him. Multiple times.

He reopened a cache as he reattached his Autobot symbol, now duller than the rest of his plating. Red optics made for a better view.

"Megatron..." One hand gently brushed fingers over lips still raw from kissing. The other was just as gentle as he caressed his chest, beneath which his spark raced. Faster and faster with each crimson glance. It slowed some as he abandoned the memories for the bitter taste of reality. But somewhere in that reality, his shining prince did exist. Like the breath of a ghost, the words left his lips, "Where are you?"

"Closer than you'd think."

Hot Rod's spark flared back to life. His chest felt like it was on fire in the most wonderful way. Both of his hands went to cover it, for he feared it may burn right through its casing and the armour over it.

"Megatron!" Hot Rod just barely kept that at a whisper. A sweep of the courtyard found it empty, but there was no way he had gotten in here unseen. Now he was on his balcony and Hot Rod had to resist rushing right into his arms after he'd spent most of the evening there. "What are you doing here?"

"I believe they call it, 'a romantic gesture.'"

No longer did Hot Rod have to resist him, because Megatron took him in his arms and kissed him like he was reuniting with his lost love, and Hot Rod accepted it just as much. For just a few, blissful moments, he forgot where he was. He forgot why he shouldn't be kissing him. Forgot who Megatron was, who he was... Ignorance truly was bliss.

He peeked open his optics just a crack. Just so he could look at him some more and make sure that he wasn't just kissing a wall while utilizing his very vivid imagination. He jumped a little when he saw two glowing red slits looking back, though, thankfully, not enough to break them apart. He let his smile into his optics, and Megatron's face became a grey and red mirror. They closed again as Megatron's lips slowed from their pursuit. Now they were familiar once more. There was no need to so hungrily take him. Both were content to just experience the softness of their love's reuniting kiss.

"If they see you they will kill you," Hot Rod whispered on the brink of a kiss. Shuddering ventilations forming mini clouds around their lips, as if shielding them from prying optics.

"I could come find you in the day unnoticed. Now, I have the night to cloak me." He lifted Hot Rod higher until his pedes barely touched the ground. "I would rather this war be ended here, enveloped in your love, than on a bloody battlefield. Where my frame would be lain to rest among my fallen, the ache in my spark never fulfilled. Never given life. Never nurtured by the sun that I, as the moon, so jealously chase."

"The sun?"

"Yes. You give off a light like no other."

Hot Rod shook his helm and let it fall, inadvertently forcing Megatron to kiss his forehead, though he took to the task willingly. "I am no sun."

"Never before has anyone, Autobot or no, wormed their way under my plating as swiftly as you have," Megatron whispered, still not quite ready to let any space come between them once more. "Even now," he tugged his chin up and kissed him, "I yearn for you mere moments after I have had you, and still yet have you." Hands ever so carefully caressed waist and back, and had Hot Rod giggling from unintended tickling. "And every moment more I spend with you, I fall deeper into such a feeling I had thought to have experienced before you, but, my dear..." Another kiss fell upon Hot Rod. "If love is what I had fallen in before, then yours is of a different breed. Or you are the first to truly bring it to my spark, and for either of those outcomes, I thank you from the bottom of my spark. And from such a well will spring as much love as a warlord can give. More, even. I will steal the love of others just so that I may one day repay you for all you have given me. But such a price is high, and love is a rare commodity in these times. So I hope you will accept what I can give, and allow my kisses to repay all of the interest I will owe you for the love you so readily give."

Fingers as black as the night traced the edge of the plating framing Hot Rod's face. "You love so freely. As freely as the Sun gives life to all without judgement, so do you give love. You must, to love a monster like me."

"A monster?" Hot Rod shook his helm. "A monster knows not of love. And I have seen you. I have seen you in footage that would have you painted as such. A furious look upon your face, your sword still dripping from its last victim. And yet, Optimus' was stained just as much. Autobot and Decepticon alike, both were consumed by violence. Noble warriors fell no matter what badge sat upon their chest."

"So naive..." Megatron moved to kiss him again, then thought against it, and instead rested his forehead on Hot Rod's. "More than just love is touched by your youth. Your optimism. You say I am not a monster, but would a monster not exploit such weaknesses and take what he wished from one too inexperienced to know better?"

"You take nothing that I am not willingly giving," Hot Rod said. "And if that is my naivety, then so be it. I give myself to it wholly."

Megatron regarded him without speaking, and his silence proved to come at the most crucial of moments, as Hot Rod heard the heavy footsteps of Ultra Magnus approach his door once more.

"Hide!" he ordered Megatron, hoping the fear in his optics would replace the explanation he lacked the time to give.

Thankfully, mercifully, he was given time to slip from Megatron's arms, but had to hope that he had the time to hide himself somehow on the balcony as Hot Rod only had the time to turn before the door was opened, without a knock this time. He bit his lip and hid his hands behind his back. Guilt bloomed like a dying flower in his gut as he was subjected to Ultra Magnus' disappointment.

"I couldn't sleep," Hot Rod said before Ultra Magnus could say anything. Not exactly a lie. Not exactly the truth, either. "I thought some night air might help."

His explanation only served to deepen Magnus' ever-present scowl.

"I will go to berth," he promised.

He crossed his arms.

Stifling a sigh, Hot Rod said, "Right now."

"A Prime should not need to be told to be in berth."

Hot Rod's spoiler halves fell even further, nearly touching his clasped hands. He gripped them even harder as he stifled the shame before it bled into his field, exposing every other emotion he was so desperately trying to hide.

"I know."

"And now, I have told you twice."

"I'm sorry."

"I am not the one you will have to apologize to when you are too tired to perform your duties," Ultra Magnus said. "Rodimus, you have a duty to your people."

Bristling, and just barely containing it, Hot Rod hissed, "*That's not my name.*"

"What was that?" Ultra Magnus used his no-nonsense voice.

"I understand. I am going to berth right now." Hot Rod gave him the most apologetic look and stance that he could muster. Years of practice proved to be very useful that night. Though that night, eons of acting wasn't going to save him. Magnus continued to glower at him. "*Right* right now," he corrected, walking over and getting under the covers.

Ultra Magnus seemed pacified by that. As pacified as he could be. But he came into the room, despite his appeasement.

"I know it is not clean," Hot Rod said. He sat up when that didn't stop Magnus. "I was going to clean it tomorrow! While I am praying." Primus, he was going for the balcony! "Or after? Before *and* after? I will go to the temple. I'll, I'll..." He ran out of things he should already be doing. Nothing left to say, he held his ventilations. Ready to... fight or, or something. Explanations wouldn't be heard, not that he really had one, or even a good excuse. All he had was a bulky warlord barely keeping himself out of sight beyond the doorway.

But, oddly, all Magnus did was close the door to the balcony.

Turning to look at Hot Rod, he said, "We would not want the next Prime catching a cold."

"No. Of, of course not."

"Get some sleep," Ultra Magnus said as he crossed back over. "I will fetch you for the run-through tomorrow."

No goodnight. Not even a good-bye. Just a door shut without another word.

Hot Rod waited until Ultra Magnus' pedestals faded to nothing, and then a while more. Then a few more moments than usual to let his racing spark calm to a less-worrying pace. He waited until he was sure that Megatron must have left, if he had somehow still been out there after he'd gone Primus-knows-where.

Still, he had to check. The yearning in his spark would not give him peace if he left it like this.

To the balcony, he went. Carefully, he opened the closed door, and though it had never been known to squeak, he still sent a prayer to Primus, should he be listening, to keep it silent. Nothing but the wind came through, and even it was mercifully quiet that night. No one and nothing awaited him on the balcony. Not even a trace of Megatron nor their encounter was there to suggest that he had been anything more than a figment of Hot Rod's imagination.

"Megatron?" Hot Rod whispered uncertainly to the empty night. He leaned out over the railing, checking the grounds for movement or even a dark mass that had not been there the night before. Years of looking out upon the same square of land had left him with a photographic memory of it, and nothing looked out of place.

"Megatron?" he tried again, less hopeful this time. His spoiler started to fall the longer his quiet calls went unanswered. Once more he tried, "Megatron?"

More silence greeted him. Horrible, unending silence. He had taken no expectations from the party. But now that he'd had that second taste, that second touch, he was addicted to the feeling. Withdrawal found his spark when the addiction wasn't fed, but at least now the robbery of his freedom and choice would settle into his frame easier. A bot with nothing left to lose was more compliant. Rodimus would take to him easily. Fill the new voids with the responsibility a Prime should have. With everything Hot Rod wasn't.

If Hot Rod had not caught the movement from the corner of his optic, he would not have seen Megatron ascend to the balcony once more. So silent were his movements, moving as though he were made of the same fabric of the night.

Hot Rod held his ventilations as he looked at him.

Megatron moved slowly, a strange new look in his optics. Something like wonder, and perhaps even some fear. Hot Rod stayed put as he came closer. All he moved was his helm to keep Megatron's face in sight.

"A Prime." Megatron's gaze was far away as he took Hot Rod's hands in his. This time, with far more care. As though this new knowledge made him breakable. Or perhaps, more likely to be broken. This *was* Optimus Prime's enemy. Was it Optimus he hated? Or the title?

"I-I am sorry, I... I mean, I did not think you would come for me like this. I thought I would never see you again, so I did not think it was important..." Hot Rod's voice diminished in his throat. "I am not a Prime yet. But I will be. Soon."

Megatron dropped to one knee, lifting Hot Rod's hand until he could place a gentle kiss to the back of a shaking hand. "I apologize. I would have greeted you properly, had I known."

Confusion won precedence on Hot Rod's face as Megatron righted himself. "You are not... mad?"

Megatron chuckled. "It changes nothing, if that is what you are worried about."

"But... we will be enemies."

"Are we not already?" Megatron asked, a careful hand sliding around Hot Rod's waist to the small of his back while a smile spread across his face. The other went to his reacquired badge. "Autobot." Then, to his own. "Decepticon."

"But at our cores, both Cybertronian," Hot Rod pointed out.

"But you..." Megatron stroked at his badge, but the feeling went much deeper. Coaxing out

ventilations far too shaky for the current touching. "You are chosen. You are *god*."

"No, I *speak* to god!" Hot Rod corrected, snippily. What should have garnered him a shocked look brought another smile and a raised optic ridge. Looking down at their pedes, he said, "I am *supposed to*, anyways. That is what Optimus tells me. That Primus will speak to me. That the Primes of the past will speak to me. Be my guiding hands. But all they give me is their silence."

"Or perhaps Optimus hears things that are simply not true and *you* are the sane one."

Hot Rod gave him a pained look.

"Never mind all that." Megatron carefully stroked Hot Rod's cheek with his pointer knuckle. "I am not here to debate the sanity of Optimus nor the existence of Primus. I am here to be with my Hot Rod. The mech who has stolen my spark in the blink of an optic." He smiled down at him as Hot Rod's surprised and blushing face rose to meet him. "The one I am inexplicably drawn to. The one with stunning azure optics, who has done all who have gazed upon him a great disservice by hiding them behind lenses."

Hot Rod smiled and blushed some more, now avoiding his gaze due to bashfulness, but a niggling worry still bit at spark and processor.

"You do know what my being a Prime means for us?" Hot Rod asked slowly. He forced himself to meet Megatron's now level gaze. His face returned to neutrality. A haunting neutrality following the range he'd experienced. "What it means for our future?"

His answer came in the form of a gentle kiss. In arms pulling him closer. In billowing ventilations following the release of Hot Rod's mouth. An answer that wasn't an answer at all, but rather another distraction like the many others Hot Rod used to cope. But this one left him far more breathless.

"Speak not of matters beyond our love," Megatron murmured.

"But--"

Silencing lips found Hot Rod's again.

"If you will not speak of happier things," Megatron said before Hot Rod could get a word out, "then I will take on the task of filling the silence. For I could spend an eternity telling you all that I love about you, and still I would not have enough time."

And just like that, the sorrow in his spark fled to let the warmth and light in. Swelling until Hot Rod was sure light would bleed out from the seams of his plating, but a different light found him then. The clouds had obscured the moons all night, but they parted then to wash them in their pale white light.

"The moons are attempting to outshine you."

A caress to his cheek had Hot Rod leaning into the touch, his optics closing and a small smile playing at his lips.

"But in showing that it, too, has light, it has made you that much more beautiful. A sun in my arms..." Megatron chuckled, leaning in. "A sun I can kiss." He barely got the last word out before his lips were on Hot Rod's again, pulling the smile further into existence. He was beaming once they were finished, but that only radiated his beauty that much more, and Megatron decided that he wasn't quite done with his mouth. Between kisses, he murmured, "I fear that you will have to order me away, or else I will never cease ravishing you with my love."

"Then I suppose we have a long night ahead of us."

Unable to ventilate properly, it was no surprise when Hot Rod's cooling fans came on. Blush overcame his face and spoiler, and Megatron smirked at him.

"Is the to-be Prime thinking impure thoughts?" The hand sliding down his waist to rest on his hip certainly was. Hot Rod couldn't decide if he wanted it to keep going. When he didn't answer, Megatron chuckled darkly and whispered, "Now, wouldn't that upset Optimus? I could just imagine his face if he found you beneath me."

Hot Rod swallowed.

"Worry not." Megatron's hands returned to where they had originally fallen. "I have no intentions of interfacing with the unwilling."

All the air rushed out of Hot Rod's vents, relief making his helm swim.

"I do not want to hurt you, Hot Rod. Could I say I love you if I intended you any harm?"

"It's not... I mean..." He held his helm. The dizziness made him feel like he was back on that dance floor, but he knew he was still. "I don't *not* want it."

The dizziness persisted when Megatron started to turn and pulled Hot Rod along with him. But this dizziness felt better. A dizziness with a source.

"I am just as happy to kiss you," Megatron reassured him. "Love takes many forms, and each is as special to me as another. I will love you how you wish for me to love you."

"Any way you want to," Hot Rod said dreamily, stars in his optics.

Slowing them to a stop, Megatron found Hot Rod's hand, bringing it to his face. Before he could kiss it, he whispered, "Then I will love you by kiss of hand," he brought it to his lips, "and stroke of cheek." Still holding his hand, Megatron turned his to stroke Hot Rod's cheek. "By dance under moonlight. I will love you with every ventilation and sparkbeat. With every circuit, diode, and strut. All will be for you, and all will belong to your spark. A sun that I will orbit for as many years as I have left to live. All will be yours, Hot Rod."

"But, Megatron--"

"I know." Hands on both of Hot Rod's hips, his fingers almost touching, he brought him in close, his forehelm resting on his. "Speak not of it. I will not waste the now on things that might come to pass in the future."

"But it *will*--"

"Hot Rod." Somehow, Megatron found more room in which to pull Hot Rod's hips in. "There were things I was told were fate. That destiny had already set me on the path meant for me. That I should shut up and comply." His fingertips dug in until they threatened to leave marks.

Now, Hot Rod felt a twinge of fear.

"I did not turn half the planet into wasteland to just roll over and take what I was told was 'just the way it is.' I have fought with everything I have to change the oppressive state of this world and I have sacrificed everything for it. Now I have found you. And whatever it is that draws me to you is a powerful force. A force that I am not sure I could fight if I wanted to. I will wage a war twice as

long if it means that I can keep you here in my arms."

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

The new issue made me sad and I need validation, so here's a chapter.

"A Prime needs his rest," Megatron insisted as he lead Hot Rod to his berth. Despite his protests, Megatron won out. Even if he did try his hardest to fight him, the warlord's strength would win out.

Resigned, Hot Rod climbed into berth and allowed Megatron to pull the covers up over him. He spent some time flattening out wrinkles Hot Rod would just make again when he shifted. A kiss was left on his forehead, then he paused, and left another on his lips. As he tried to pull away, Hot Rod followed.

"Now, what would Ultra Magnus say if he saw you neglecting your recharge?" Megatron said.

"He wouldn't say anything." Hot Rod smirked. "He would go straight to punching you right out the window."

"And keep me from you?" Megatron shook his helm with a smile as he picked up one of Hot Rod's hands. It curled up inside the much larger one that held it, and Megatron opened his own hand just a little as he brought it to his face to kiss at fingers tingling with excitement. "That would be a costly mistake. I will leave once I have had my fill. Enough to get by until I may see you again. Ultra Magnus or no."

Again, he tried to leave, and again, Hot Rod followed. "Would you leave me so unsatisfied?" They smiled in tandem as Megatron leaned back and Hot Rod forward. Someone had to stop eventually, and that someone was Megatron, so Hot Rod took his chance to take another kiss. "Would you leave me before *I* have had *my* fill?"

Megatron started to back away again, his smile growing as Hot Rod followed him again as though magnetized. And so began their dance to the window. Pushing and pulling. Kissing and caressing. Staying just out of reach until one could steal a touch of lip or hand.

"You are not going to make it easy to leave, are you?" Megatron asked. Though Hot Rod hoped he expected no answer, unless the answer he sought sat upon Hot Rod's pursuing lips.

"Take me with you," Hot Rod whispered on his ventilations.

Megatron paused just before the moonlight touched his plating. Fingers found Hot Rod's Autobot symbol, teasing at the edges. "Your death lies upon your chest if you follow me."

Hot Rod bit his lip, only releasing it to give Megatron access to it.

Chuckling against his lips before giving him one kiss more, Megatron murmured, "I would welcome you a Decepticon. But until you have made up your mind, here you must stay, and back to Kaon I must go. We are but star-crossed lovers, my dear. An unfortunate circumstance, but our love is the kind worth fighting for. It is the kind that is worth sneaking around behind enemy lines, perhaps at the cost of our lives. I would much prefer that life to be mine. You have yet to live a life as rich and full as you should. Shut up in your room, feeding off whatever light seeks to find you there. I want

to see you as carefree as I did on this night."

Hot Rod's optics swam. "I can only achieve that if I follow you."

"As I said, my dear," with the lightest of touches, he stroked Hot Rod's cheek, "I will welcome you a Decepticon. Something that I cannot give up lightly." He stopped Hot Rod's words before they sprung free with another soft kiss. "Something that you cannot accept lightly, nor can you abandon your destiny, without far more thought and reflection than can be done in a single evening."

"I haven't enough time for anything, it seems," Hot Rod said sadly. "Megatron, I am to be Prime in four days' time. If I do not go with you now..." He rested his forehead against the symbol that brought him so much anxiety.

"Be still, my dear." Comforting hands found Hot Rod's back. Smooth strokes followed the curve of his spinal strut. "Not even Primus could keep me from you."

"Remind me, then," Hot Rod said quietly, looking up at him. "Remind me of your love. Give me something to hold onto when the cold night comes creeping in to steal all the warmth you have so graciously left me. Leave enough so that the night and I may both be satisfied. Quell the unyielding hunger of the darkness."

Hot Rod felt light headed again as he was once more dipped into a kiss. Not once did he think that Megatron may drop him. His strength and his devotion saw fit to keeping Hot Rod aloft and entangled in his love.

"My love will find you in the dead of night," Megatron whispered against his lips. "When the freezing chill is at its coldest. It will seek you. Such a fire, it will find. Fueled not only by the flames within you, but the ones that I will fan across any great distance that would seek to separate us. The night, the cold, will not prevail, for I am a part of you. I have planted myself deep within your spark, where my love for you will grow stronger with each passing moment. Even when I cannot be with you, because this cruel world will try to quash any happiness, I will still be here. I will protect you. I will always protect you. I will be with you. Always. Even if your destiny steals you away, I will protect you. And whenever you doubt yourself, I will lend you my love to carry you through."

The next kiss Megatron left upon his lips was greeted by the awed slackness of Hot Rod's own. Such an admission could warm him for millennia.

Hot Rod allowed Megatron to right him, his spark still aflutter and his optics still watching him with awe. He let him take steps towards the balcony, but his love held him in his gravitational pull and would not allow him leave so easily.

Eventually, the two ran out of room. Megatron hooked a leg over the railing, pausing when small hands pawed at him. He gave him the kiss he desired, but then had to leave. An affectionate look softened his features as he looked at Hot Rod for a little while longer, and then his horizontal exit turned vertical.

"Will you come again tomorrow?" Hot Rod asked, a pleading look in his optics as he leaned as far over the railing as he dared. He stretched down until his feet didn't touch the ground. He would hang his trust on his arm's strength if it meant he could get one more kiss from his beloved.

Megatron paused and looked up once more. "As long as you will have me, I will come every night."

"I will have you. I will *always* have you."

"Then I shall leave you with this." Megatron ascended just enough to touch the bridge of his lips to Hot Rod's. Not quite a full kiss, but it fulfilled them as emotionally as it would have if they were in each other's arms. "Until tomorrow, my love."

"You are certainly taking your time to recharge."

Of all the things Megatron would have enjoyed waking up to, a screechy seeker was not one of them. Especially one who was clearly displeased. But up he got regardless, though not without visible disdain on his face.

"I did not hear a knock," Megatron said grumpily. Every intent to sound authoritative was lost on the exhaustion keeping his frame where it lay. The warm afterglow in his spark kept his frame warm even as he let the covers fall away from his shoulders. Even under the cold glare of his second-in-command. He let his optics drop down and then rise back up Starscream's frame where he leaned on the doorframe. "Yes?" He raised an optic ridge.

"You seem to let just about anyone in here." Starscream looked down his nose at him. "I assumed you would not mind my intrusion. Not that *I* should be an intrusion anymore." He said those last words under his ventilations, and either he assumed Megatron's hearing had weakened due to his age, or he had intended him to hear those words as he had meant.

Stretching casually, Megatron said, "And yet you did not come here after the party." He caught the bristling seeker's optics. "Who's berth did *you* end up in?"

"I was with my *trine*, if you must know!" Starscream snapped.

Annoyed, Megatron muttered, "And you are not still with them *why*?"

Starscream pretended to not hear him but his wings hiked up high with contempt. "And I see that you are quite happy to give away things that do not belong to you." He sauntered over beside the berth, but Megatron was not his destination, but the sword that rested on the wall near it. He gave the hilt an almost sensual stroke. "Should I assume the same for all that lies within this room? I am sure I could find some fanatic who would love this more than you ever could."

"I gave you that garment," Megatron said, tired and now *grumpy*. Not once had it ever left that drawer until he had clipped it to Hot Rod's spoiler. It suited *him* much better, anyways. "It is mine to give to another, if I so choose."

"I was not aware that gifts could be re-gifted by the bots who gave them." Starscream's wings twitched up as he passed back across the room, giving Megatron a cold glare as he did so. "You haven't gotten him hidden under there, then?"

Megatron's fatigue got the best of him when he deigned to give the empty berth another glance over. Again it got him when he allowed the wash of loneliness spread out through his field. Hopefully he snapped it back in before Starscream felt even a wisp.

"So, not a harlot?" Starscream sounded more angry than he should at an empty berth. Then he scoffed, a smile spreading across his face. "Scared him off, did you?"

"I do not have to have this conversation with you," Megatron thought aloud following a growl. A

few more hours of recharge and he would have kept that to himself. Rising quickly and walking just as fast, he ordered, "Get out of my way."

Starscream did, more surprised than anything, but *of course* he pursued.

"You danced with him, and then no one saw a whiff of you for the rest of the night." Starscream's steps bordered on running in his attempt to keep up with Megatron. "So, did you frag him and then allow him leave right after?"

Megatron stopped suddenly, turning a cold glare on Starscream. He forced it to soften. Not so much as to a point of love, but of indifference. No feelings, negative or positive, should be wasted on him.

"We shared a dance, did we not?" He smiled as he saw SIC's optics go unfocused for a moment as he trailed a finger up the edge of his wing. He liked to think himself hard to read, but he could feel the twinge of jealousy in the field he was so desperately trying to conceal.

"Yes. *One*."

"And there were many bots at the party, yes? Are you saying I should have neglected them all for *your* sake?"

"Had I been neglected equally, I would have no quarrel with you." He passed by, wings high and tight. A displeased and yet seductive look following Megatron all the while. "And yet you decide to devote your time to that fiery mech... Who might he be? I did not recognize him. Let alone as someone important enough to have been invited to such a prestigious event."

"Do you claim to know every Decepticon there is or ever was?"

"I *claim*," Starscream clenched his denta and fists, "to know those who associate with *you*. That mech was a mech I have never seen. And so, as your second-in-command, I demand that you tell me his name!"

"What's in a name?" He left his room and assumed Starscream would drop this whole thing, but he continued his pursuit.

"What *is* in a name, indeed. Nothing that any bot would try to hide."

Megatron shrugged. "I do not remember. In fact, I do not recall him telling me his name at all. What should I care? It was one night and a few dances. Nothing more. I care about it as much as you should, which is not at all."

"You have lied about less important matters," Starscream said. "Why should I believe you?"

"Because knowing his name, or anything else about him, is of no consequence. He could perish in the next battle, for all we know. It is best not to form any attachments." He gave Starscream a meaningful glare following that, but either Starscream ignored it or thought himself the exception. "I, for one, have not thought of him until *you* brought him up. If you wish for me to forget about him, then you should drop this." He could order him, if Starscream were one to follow orders. He kept walking, taking long strides that forced Starscream to walk faster, but he used his thrusters to shoot ahead.

Stopping right in front of him, fanning his wings out so that they nearly touched the walls on either side of him, he demanded, "The name. Tell it to me."

With a sigh and a roll of his optics, he deigned him with the answer he sought. "Hot Rod. Not that

it is of any consequence to you, or me, for that matter."

"Quite a common name," Starscream growled. "How convenient."

"You have asked and I have answered. Is there anything else you feel the need to bother me with? Perhaps something a little more *worthy* of my time and attention?" He *gently* pushed him to the side when he continued to block his path. Alright, so perhaps he was less than gentle, but that certainly didn't warrant Starscream's offended look nor the dramatic stumbling. He righted himself, of course. It would have been downright embarrassing if such a small shove had toppled him. Not that Starscream wasn't willing to stoop to such humiliation if it would sympathize himself to others.

Nothing more than a seething glare was directed towards him.

"Good. Now leave me be."

"Hot Rod..."

"Mmm..." Hot Rod rolled over onto his side, pulling his blanket over his helm. The sun fell warmly on his frame. It tempted his optic covers to lift, but the fatigue keeping them closed pulled harder. The morning would have to wait.

"Hot Rod, wake up." The gentle voice trying to rouse him followed with a gentle hand resting on his shoulder. A soft shake followed. "It is getting late."

A smile graced Hot Rod's face as he waited for more tenderness to come his way. A caress to his waist or thigh. Perhaps even a chest to rest against his back. Following that, if he was lucky, a pair of arms encircling his waist and even encouraging him to stay in berth a little while longer. Enjoying each other's company and relishing in the sleepy affection of the morning.

"Hot Rod." Now their voice took on an edge of annoyance.

"Five more minutes, Megatron," Hot Rod murmured, his words sluggish.

"Megatron? What kind of dream are *you* having?"

The next shake was much rougher, and much harder to sleep through. Hot Rod's optics opened with the ache of a night with too few hours. A scowl overtook his face whether Hot Rod wanted it there or not. Might as well use it on-- Drift?

"Good. You're up." Drift tore the covers from Hot Rod's frame. "Ultra Magnus is going to be here any minute. Up!"

"Frag!" The sudden adrenaline got Hot Rod out of berth, though not as prettily as he would have liked. He had a feeling that Primes didn't start the day by falling on their face. A hit that exacerbated the helmache he just noticed he had. Now he couldn't notice anything else. He groaned and held it, staying where he'd ended up.

"Drank a little too much?" Drift assumed. He crouched down next to his amica. "Don't worry. I brought some painkillers for your morning ration. Go take a shower and I'll get it ready for you."

"I showered last night," Hot Rod moaned.

"Let me help you up," Drift offered. He chuckled as he rested one hand on Hot Rod's spoiler mount

and the other went under Hot Rod's arm, tugging a little. "Is it safe to assume that you had a good time last night?"

Despite the throbbing pain in his helm, his spark still glowed from the aftermath of Megatron's love.

"Drift..." Hot Rod pushed himself up off the floor, grateful for Drift when his weary arms refused to support his weight. With his help, he managed to get to his pedes. Basically falling on him in what he would call a hug if questioned, Hot Rod said dreamily, "I had the most wonderful night of my life."

Drift grinned, throwing an arm around Hot Rod. "So yours was the second berth you went to last night?"

"Well, not exactly..." Hot Rod turned his helm away from him and hid his face, a blush beginning to spread across his cheeks.

"What do you--?"

Drift was across the room before the second knock to Hot Rod's door could land. The third fell once he was halfway down the building, and the fourth never came. Instead, Ultra Magnus opened the door, looking around the room before his gaze finally fell on Hot Rod.

"I thought I heard somebody." The words ended with the glare of suspicion Hot Rod was quite familiar with.

Hot Rod shrugged.

"Hm. Well, get ready. We leave for the temple soon." Ultra Magnus looked around the room one more time, then left.

With as much fluidity and grace as always, Drift hefted himself back onto the balcony. "So... it is... it is really happening."

"It is just the run through," Hot Rod said, though his voice took on a similar tinge of sadness. He sighed and it ended on a groan as he sat on the end of his berth. "I still do not have any of my vows written. *Frag!*" He punched his own hand, gritting his denta.

"Let us not worry about what is not done, and worry about what needs to be done *now*." Drift got an energon ration from Hot Rod's stores, and mixed in a sweetener, an energy booster, and some painkillers. "Like refueling. Prime or not, you need your energon."

"I might as well be yawning the whole time," Hot Rod griped. He lay back, groaning from tiredness and from the knowledge of his eventual demise. The fireball Optimus saw would come, but not in the way he hoped. The fire would burn, hot and unyielding. An end, rather than a beginning. Cybertron would fall into chaos.

"I know that look," Drift said. He walked over to Hot Rod and offered him a hand. Once his amica accepted it, he pulled him into a sitting position. "You are over-thinking, and probably overreacting."

"I am a scourge on the Prime lineage."

Drift scoffed. "You have put Optimus so high up on a pedestal that you fail to see your own worth. Have you ever considered that perhaps-- drink," he handed Hot Rod the glass, "--Primus saw that Optimus' leadership only lead our species further into the war, and that *you* are the only mech who

could change that?"

"Drift, please..."

"*Drink.*" He lifted the glass closer to Hot Rod's mouth. "Drink, and listen to me. No mortal knows the future. Not me, not you, not even Optimus. Primus can send us signs. He can send them to Optimus, or to you, or to *anyone*. Signs. Things to be interpreted. And in interpretation comes bias, and through those biases comes hope. A hope of a planet ravaged by war and an impending famine. Signs can be misread to fulfill that hope. So perhaps you are not the *true* heir to Optimus' throne, but perhaps he was not the true heir to Sentinel's. Maybe Primus sent more signs that we were blind to, or else too hopeful to recognize. Or perhaps you *are*. Maybe you are the one thing, the last piece of the puzzle, that will reunite our divided planet. Or perhaps you will lead as best you can, and Cybertron will be no worse off than under Optimus' rule."

Hot Rod just sat quietly and drank.

"You will do your best, Hot Rod." Drift sat down next to him. "That is all anyone can ask of you. And remember that you are never alone. You can look to Optimus for advice, because as righteous as he is, or seems to be, he was once as lost and confused as you are. I can imagine the look on his face when Sentinel and his entourage showed up to take him from *his* life. I doubt anyone would take to that easily *or* gracefully."

"But that still does not help me *now*. I must stand before Primus in a few days and I still do not even know what I am going to say!"

"You know the Oath. I have only heard you recite it about a million times." Drift playfully nudged him with his shoulder.

"But I have not written my vows. I have thought about it day and night, seldom is it far from my processor, and yet... nothing." Hot Rod took another drink at Drift's strong stare. He shook his helm slowly. "But Ultra Magnus and Optimus will not understand the work I have put into this. They will see a lack of vows and discipline. Then they will give me that look they always do..." Hot Rod deflated.

Drift put an arm around Hot Rod. "You can come to me for help, too. So. Let's brainstorm. What does leadership mean to you? What do you hope to accomplish?"

"To not utterly destroy Cybertron," Hot Rod said pitifully.

"Don't worry, Optimus and Megatron already did that for you." Drift smiled at him. Something about it set Hot Rod off, and he started to laugh. A laugh that consumed him like a bright light after years of darkness. He dragged Drift down into his boisterous laughter, until they both held their aching sides.

They tried to stop laughing multiple times, but then they would share a look and keep set each other off again. When Hot Rod was finally able to speak, he said, "I needed that. You always know just how to help me."

"And I will continue to help you." Drift let his forehelm come to rest on Hot Rod's. "Regardless of what the others call you. No matter how close you are to Primus. You are Hot Rod, my amica. Always."

Hot Rod nuzzled against Drift until his helm found the crook of Drift's neck. "Good. You were always the most comfortable of my friends."

"You finally admit that you only became amica with me for my comfortable shoulders!"

"Stop being so comfy and I will stop resting on you." Hot Rod turned his back to Drift and lay back on him, taking a languid sip of his energon. "Aaahh... Now *this* is how a Prime should live."

"Then you *definitely* have to remember me," Drift said as he wrapped his arms around him.

"Yeah, yeah."

Chapter 6

"I vow to... to find a peaceful end to this war." Hot Rod looked down at his shaking hands while the Matrix thrummed with life in Optimus' chest. A pale blue light shone through the seams of his chest and fell upon Hot Rod as if judging him. Everything in this holy place felt like a judgement. The way his wavering voice echoed back his uncertainty. The way the sun shone directly down where he stood. *Especially* the way Optimus stared him down. "I-I vow... um..." Hot Rod bit his lip.

Optimus took a couple steps closer.

"I will... I will--"

"Write your vows before you appear before Primus?" Optimus finished for him.

"I have been trying, I swear!" Hot Rod turned to face his mentor, but every other excuse or explanation dried up on his glossa when he saw the disappointed look on his face. Disappointment that he didn't even turn his way. His optics remained on the floor.

"Hot Rod... *Rodimus Prime*."

Hot Rod clenched his fists and threw his angry gaze to the side so that Optimus wouldn't see it.

"You are next in line to be the vessel of Primus. The link between our mortal realm and the Allspark. And perhaps most importantly, you will become the new leader of the Autobots." Optimus circled Hot Rod and the altar. "All weighty titles. All hold responsibilities of the utmost importance. When our troops feel weak, feel helpless, they will look to you for strength. For guidance. You cannot falter when this happens. You will often not have time to think. Megatron will not grant you any mercy. Remember this, Hot Rod."

The excuse of humility came in handy when the momentary rush of feelings brought a wayward smile to Hot Rod's face. He chased it away before Optimus could question him.

"Any perceived weakness, he will exploit. If he thinks your troops do not trust you explicitly, he may even try to turn them against you. And your troops will not trust you if they question your connection to Primus for even *one moment*. Which means that the day you give the Oath could very well be the most important day of your life.

"Hot Rod." Optimus paused and sighed. It rumbled deep through his chest, but the cavernous room echoed it back until it seemed that the temple *itself* was sighing. Hot Rod felt trapped in his disappointment. Caged in expectations he couldn't hope to meet in fifty lifetimes.

"I have tried for many years to get you to understand the weight that has been placed upon your shoulders. Out of every single Cybertronian, Primus shone his holy light upon you." He gestured to the skylight above, as though where he currently stood proved his worthiness. "I do understand that this is a big change. Even I had some reservations when I was chosen."

Optimus finished his circling and stopped behind Hot Rod, who looked back and then slowly turned to face his mentor, though he kept his gaze to his hands.

Optimus rested a hand on Hot Rod's shoulder. "Speak from the spark, young one. The answers that you seek lie there, if only you give it a chance and *listen*. I find that this place amplifies not only Primus' voice, but your own. Perhaps you should devote the remainder of your day to looking inside yourself. Call upon Primus and re-evaluate what he means to you. Ask yourself what you can do

for your people. What you *will* do for your people."

Finally lifting his optics to meet Optimus', Hot Rod tried to look hopeful. *Happy*, even. Tried.

"You will find it," Optimus insisted. "When you least expect it, it will come to you. The light will always come in times of darkness, and these are dark times, indeed. You are the light, Rodimus. Primus has shown me that."

"Then why hasn't he shown *me*?" Hot Rod resigned his outburst before he'd fully experienced one of Optimus' silencing glowers. Optics on his pedes, he said, almost inaudibly, "I will pray."

"You will find your fire, Hot Rod. I have seen it."

Optimus left on those words. So similar to all the other times he'd tried to comfort Hot Rod. Tried to tell him that he was destined for greatness. That *Primus* said he was destined for greatness. But there was nothing anyone could say that would comfort the unending silence of this place.

"Taking a nap, or should I prepare for another pep talk?" Drift asked as he pushed open the door to the balcony.

"I'm trying to sleep," Hot Rod said grumpily.

"Uh huh." The berth creaked when Drift sat down. "You never turn in this early."

"Rodimus Prime does," Hot Rod said miserably.

"That bad, huh?"

"Just leave me, Drift. Do it now. Leave me before I'm forced to renounce you in front of Primus. In front of all of *Cybertron*. Perhaps the hurt will lessen with only us present to its ending." Hot Rod bunched the blanket up and held it before his spark, tightening in his chest. He shrank even further when Drift's hand fell upon his back. He shut his optics tight. "Please, Drift. Leave me be."

"What happened?" Drift asked gently.

"It doesn't matter."

"Doesn't it?"

"No."

"Then it is nothing to be upset about, is it?" While he couldn't see it, Hot Rod could tell that Drift was smiling. The one he always donned whenever he "won."

Hot Rod groaned and fully succumbed to the fetal position that had been threatening to overtake him since he'd retreated to his berth. A berth that was in a room that he was beginning to realize was not the safe place he'd thought it was. What with Ultra Magnus barging in the door and Drift the balcony, he was never granted any real privacy. Perhaps this was the ultimate preparation for his transition to Rodimus Prime.

"Leave me be," Hot Rod repeated.

"We were going to go racing," Drift gently reminded him. He swallowed, his voice quiet as he added, "One last time?"

"There's no point..."

"Okay." Drift tugged at Hot Rod's stubborn shoulder. "Come on. This isn't you."

"Rodimus Prime will take up residence soon. Perhaps it is best that Hot Rod vacates sooner rather than later."

Drift sighed. "Well," he flopped down on the berth beside Hot Rod, "then I guess I am just going to have to stay here with whoever you are because I have nothing better to do."

"Drift--"

"Nope. I am staying right here with you."

"Go live--"

"Hot Rod. One of two things is going to happen after you take the Oath. One, you *do* remember me, and all of this will have been for naught. Two, you do not, and I either have to *make* you remember, or I will have all the time in the world to 'live my life.' So for now, I am going to lay here with you. Sometimes living your life just means laying around with someone you care about."

"That was what I was hoping I might be permitted to do," a new voice from the balcony said.

Drift sat up, confused, while Hot Rod rolled over much more slowly. In a much quicker movement, Drift got to his pedes, his field flaring with alarm and a twinge of fear that had Hot Rod turning faster. After everything that had happened that day, though, Drift was still faster, and his defenses went up before Hot Rod could get a word in.

"Megatron!" Drift reflexively reached for his swords, but found himself clutching the empty air above his scabbards. Snarling, he took a defensive stance before Hot Rod, which he imagined looked much more impressive when he actually had his swords. "Get out of here, Hot Rod!"

"Woah, woah, Drift!" Hot Rod flailed to escape his prison of sheets to find Drift's shoulder, but he moved as Megatron did, and his hand never found him. "Drift, it's okay!"

"*Okay?*" Drift didn't even give him a glance. "Megatron is here to assassinate the next in line and you think that's *okay*? Hot Rod, he's here to kill you!"

"If I wanted to kill either of you, you would already be dead. After all," Megatron smirked, "You are both unarmed."

"As are you!" Drift countered. He took a step to the side keep himself between Hot Rod and Megatron when he moved. The glare he gave Megatron looked sharp enough to cut through armor.

Megatron stopped about halfway across the room when Drift let out a subconscious growl. "I survived centuries in the Pits. I can assure you, that I have just as much confidence in my fists as I do my weapons. I come in peace of frame, but not of spark. For my spark has not known calm since I met the one you seek to guard. Though I have come to love the chaos, and I would see that my spark never calmed, if you would move aside."

Drift scoffed, the fear in his field being replaced by confusion. "Yeah, you would like that, wouldn't you?"

"Deadlock--"

"It's Drift!"

"Drift. It is a privilege to know Hot Rod, and I would never see harm come to him. By my hand, or any others. A restless night is behind me, and I fear the next will be even more so if I don't seek the attention of the Autobot I choose to love, not hate."

"Love?" Thrown off, Drift turned back to give Hot Rod a look that never truly landed, because he whipped around again when Megatron made another move. "What the hell are you talking about?"

Megatron chuckled. "Hot Rod? Would you like to explain, or shall I?"

Hot Rod bit his lip. He looked between Megatron, standing casually with a hand on his hip, and Drift, still locked in his defensive stance. The wrong move could start a fight that would escalate and force him to attend the funerals of multiple loved ones. But what *was* the right move?

Letting his field flood the room, Hot Rod forced his spark to calm and let that feeling seep out to surround them. Drift's distress fought back hard, but began to dissipate with a wary glance back at his amica.

"Drift, you need to calm down," Hot Rod said softly. "Megatron is not going to hurt me, and he will not hurt you either." He gave Megatron a hard and meaningful glance. Turning back to Drift, he added, "But you have to stand down."

"What the hell are you talking about?" Drift shouted.

"Keep your voice down!" Hot Rod urged. "If Ultra Magnus hears you, I will not be able to stop what happens. Please, Drift. You have to trust me."

"It's *him* I don't trust!"

"I am not asking you to trust him." With slow, careful movements, Hot Rod finally disentangled himself and stood. Drift immediately put himself between him and Megatron. "Drift I met him at the party last night. We... we talked."

"My dear, I would say we did much more than just 'talk,'" Megatron purred.

Drift bristled. His field pushed back hard enough to dislodge Hot Rod's and his hand, too, when he rested it on Drift's shoulder. Every joint on his amica tightened in a way that Hot Rod had seen time and again on war footage. It was the sort of stance that could only be followed by something that Hot Rod had never seen in real life. Something that sent his spark racing with fear.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

It's a good thing my friend Allyson is really invested in this because I almost forgot to post a chapter today!

"Drift, don't do anything rash!" Hot Rod pleaded. After trying and failing to pierce Drift's unyielding field, Hot Rod blurted out, "I asked him to come, Drift!"

"What?" Surprise filled the room, engulfing them all and bringing a smug smile to Megatron's face. Drift only offered Hot Rod a glance. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"You told me to have a fling with someone!" Hot Rod argued.

"When I told you to have a fling I did not mean 'have a fling with the scourge of Cybertron!'" Even with Drift's anger turned towards Megatron, the feeling still managed to reach around to touch Hot Rod.

"Well... um..."

"I do not need you to make excuses for yourself, Hot Rod. I know of his charms, and those with a much stronger will have fallen for them." Drift turned his helm just enough for Hot Rod to see the corner of his optic, but its focus was still turned towards the warlord. He turned back to say forcefully, "You need to leave. Now."

"Drift, wait!" Hot Rod took a hold of one of his shoulders and tried to pull him back, but he held sturdy. "Let me explain."

"There is nothing to explain. You need to get out of here and sound the alarm. I will keep him busy."

"No! Drift, look, it was more than just a fling, okay? I'm not even sure I can call it a fling. We didn't interface or anything, okay?"

"What?" Again, Drift was surprised out of his stance. This time, though, Megatron had the sense to stay still.

With a sigh, Hot Rod circled around in front of Drift, despite his protests. He held him by the shoulders. "He is not going to hurt me. He figured out I was an Autobot right away. In a sea of Decepticons, he knew I was not one of them, and yet I still stand here, very much alive. And... he is not alone in his feelings of love."

Drift's mouth hung slack even while his arms stayed tight in position.

"He will not hurt me," Hot Rod repeated. "And he will not hurt you. Please, Drift. To watch my amica and my lover battle would be too much for my spark. Already it flickers with worry."

Laying a hand over Drift's spark, Hot Rod half-turned to face Megatron. He did his best to emulate the sternness of his mentors, and could only hope it showed in his expression. "You will not fight on

this day. As long as you proclaim to love me, not a drop of Autobot energon will find your hands." He hardened his gaze further. "I will stand in the way of any of my brethren if you choose to harm them."

Thankfully, Megatron's smugness faded to be replaced with a similar seriousness. He looked more like Megatron the warlord, and Hot Rod didn't know if that should frighten him or not.

"Hot Rod--"

"I know what I am doing, Drift. He will not hurt me. I know it in my spark." Hot Rod rested his other hand over his own spark, feeling his and Drift's beat in time. Closing his optics and then opening them halfway, he murmured, "I have never felt worthy of my destiny. Never has it sat peacefully in my processor. Being called 'Prime,' being a leader, even just standing in the *temple*... it all feels so wrong. But Megatron... Every moment with him has felt as right as you being my amica, Drift." He turned back to give Drift a small smile, while also sending a controlled burst of love and calmness Megatron's way.

"I know there is no future for us. Soon both our destinies will consume whatever love we could have had. We may even have to turn against each other." The wave of sorrow from Megatron hit him hard, but he continued. "Drift, you told me that I should enjoy whatever time I have left, and I have chosen to spend it with Megatron. I have found a strange but wonderful peace with him. He is the calm in the storm that is my impending fate."

"And how are you to know if this calm is not just the eye of the storm?" Drift pointed out. He grabbed Hot Rod's wrist to pry it off of him, and then in a much gentler move, held it. "I know him, Hot Rod. I have seen the way he tosses aside lovers who no longer offer him anything. I refuse to watch someone as vulnerable as you succumb to the same fate. Not when I could have intervened."

"May I offer some words of comfort?" Megatron asked, taking a step forward. He raised his hands in surrender when Drift returned to his snarling stance.

"Drift." Hot Rod took a deep ventilation in, then out. "Optimus has told me many things about Megatron. Of his ruthlessness. How he is always three steps ahead of any and all of his enemies. But tell me, what kind of plan could he possibly have by showing up unarmed to kill me in my room? And would someone as smart as you all say Megatron is not think to come when he would be sure there would be no one else here? Not to mention, Drift, that he has been here before."

"What?"

"I had to flee the party," Hot Rod explained. "Megatron found me and further proved his love for me. He could have killed me then and there, but he didn't. He could have killed me at the party after he discovered I was an Autobot, but he didn't. Even after he discovered that I was next in line to be Prime, he still let me live. Because he *does* love me."

Drift looked at Hot Rod as if he were a newbuild. "What if this is just a part of a much bigger plan? Have you ever considered that he is using you to get to Optimus? Or that he wants to warp your naive perceptions of him so that you will not order the Autobots against him once you take command?"

"Then why allow you to find out?" Hot Rod asked. "Why allow you to put these doubts in my processor?"

Drift said nothing, but his pained look said more than words could.

"Trust in me, Drift. How can I be trusted to make decisions worthy of a Prime if I cannot even be trusted to choose my partners?"

"You cannot choose a partner, Hot Rod. You are to be bound to the Matrix."

"So which is it?" Hot Rod asked angrily.

Drift was taken aback. "What do you mean?"

"Before the party, you said that I choose my own fate. Now you speak as though my destiny is as inescapable as everyone else says it is. And..." Hot Rod shut his optics tightly, clenching his fists. Defeat settled into his frame before he spoke next. "I harbour no illusions of spending the rest of my life with him. I know that we cannot bond. That we cannot have the life we wish we could. But is it so wrong to take what we can *while* we can? As you said, I cannot abstain from things I have not experienced. Megatron is showing me what true love is." He turned fully to Megatron then. "And I am eternally grateful that he has. My life had never felt so full and rich until he held me in his arms."

A smile graced Megatron's face and made him all the more beautiful. His field reached out tentatively to touch Hot Rod's, then grasped Hot Rod's firmly as he, too, reached out. Now if only their hands could do the same.

Turning back to Drift, he asked of his amica, "Can you trust me?"

Drift sighed. "I want to, Hot Rod. I really do. If he were any other Decepticon... He has so much to gain while you have so much to lose. I cannot just say that I trust him."

"You do not have to. I just need you to trust *me*. Trust that I would not put all of this at risk if the reward were not so great." Hot Rod pulled Drift into a hug and didn't miss the glare he gave Megatron. "Please. We only have so much time."

"Drift."

His name falling from Megatron's lips had Drift ducking out of Hot Rod's hold and stepping before Hot Rod once more. He sought to defend someone who did not need to be defended.

Megatron dropped to one knee, holding his arms out to his sides. "If you cannot trust me alone with Hot Rod, then slay me now. I will not fight back."

"Megatron!"

Megatron ignored Hot Rod's call. "Would you terminate a mech who refuses to fight back?" he asked Drift. "Will you leave Deadlock in your past? Or prove that he has never left?"

Drift practically snarled, and yet the edges of his field softened. Dropping out of his stance to watch Megatron, distrust still taking precedence in the blue glow of his optics, he mimed the sheathing of his swords. At least the Sanctuary did something right this time. Had he had his swords, there would have been a mess to clean up, if not a corpse or two. His amica and his lover lost to a misunderstanding.

"I will not disrupt the peace of this Sanctuary," Drift decided. He took a few steps closer to Megatron, though he kept out of arm's reach. "But heed my warning: if you are the one to do such a thing, I will disrupt any and all peace you seek to find, and I will not hesitate to end your reign, once and for all."

Megatron stood slowly, maintaining optic contact with Drift. "You have my word, if that means

anything to you, that I will not hurt Hot Rod. Nor will I allow anyone else to see him come to harm."

"You harm him by giving him hope!" Drift shouted.

"Physical harm, then." Regretful red optics regarded Drift and then moved beyond him to Hot Rod. "I do not take any delight in the pain I will put him through. If it is of any consolation, I will feel the same pain." Megatron's hand covered his Decepticon symbol. "Just imagining a life without him brings more pain than I care to admit."

Drift pursed his lips, and for the first time that day, turned his back on Megatron. He locked optics with Hot Rod, feeding off of his trust so as to not turn back around. He stared for a long while, reaching for him with his field and finding the love and the trust there.

"Your feelings are pure," Drift stated. Turning back to Megatron, he said, "How can I be sure that yours are as pure and true as my amica's?"

"I am not sure I can," Megatron said. None of his usual sass remained on his face. Only a resigned look shone in the red of his optics. "Perhaps, if it will ease your worry, you can place your trust in love itself. Ours is as unconditional as ever. Neither faction nor destiny will keep me from loving him as deeply as if he were one of my own."

"You have never cared for your own much," Drift shot back bitterly.

"All the more reason to trust that this is real. I would see Hot Rod taken better care of than even my Decepticons."

"To me, that shows more of your true character." Drift crossed his arms, turning back to Hot Rod and crossing over to him. He shook his helm. "Of all the mechs you had to go and fall in love with, you choose *him*?"

Hot Rod smiled. "Do any of us choose who we love? Ultra Magnus has said the same of you, Drift. *He* does not trust *you*."

"But--!" Drift growled in frustration.

"Drift," Hot Rod said softly. Kindly. "I would not risk this much on a fleeting feeling. There is... there is something to him. Something to us. Something I cannot explain, but it is something that is fundamentally *right*. He will not hurt me. It would be self-infliction."

Drift frowned. "I still cannot shake the feeling that he is stringing you along for some nefarious plan. It feels suspect that he should go after the next Prime."

"I feel safe with him. So if that was his plan, it is done. But I should tell you, Drift, that he pursued me and followed me here before he was aware that I was to be Prime. And now you will argue that *that* was all a part of his plan, too. That he knew who I was before I walked in. But how could he have known that I would attend that party? Has he been planning my assassination and I simply fell into his hands? Of course these are all possibilities. Similarly, it is possible that after the Oath I will cease to remember my amica, a mech whom I love dearly. But he is a mech that I choose to remember, as much as I will choose to love the so-called 'Scourge of Cybertron.'

"Fate controls my life, Drift. I am fated to be Prime, and I believe that I was fated to meet and to love Megatron just as much. If I am to be slain by a lover's hand, then so be it. That is my fate, as well. And it is a far more believable fate than my 'inherent' Primeliness."

Drift gave Hot Rod a long look and then sighed. "And he makes you happy?"

Hot Rod nodded. "Very. More than I can ever remember being."

Drift inhaled sharply, then let it out slowly. "Alright. I trust you. Just... be careful."

Icy blue optics turned on Megatron as Drift moved to him like an incoming storm. "If he comes back with even *one* scratch..." This time, Drift got right into his face, or as close as he could without rising to the fore of his pedes. "I will not rest until your energon stains the ground. I will stalk you to the ends of time, if necessary."

"Worry not, Drift. To kill him would be to kill myself. I am but a half who has finally found the one who fills that yawning void so perfectly. And having had such a wonderful taste, I find the rest of the world bitter. To not taste his sweetness, well, one simply could not continue to function. If Hot Rod were to pass, you would not have to stalk me. I would accept your gift of death with open arms."

Drift's optics widened with shock, then softened a little. "He is special to you."

"Something..." He looked over Drift, smiling warmly at Hot Rod while a hand went over his chest. "Something drew me to him. Something bigger than myself. Something bigger than even *him*. While I am unsure *what* or *why*," his attention refocused on Drift, "but I know that it is something that cannot be ignored."

Hot Rod thought he saw a little smile on Drift's face, but it could have been a trick of the light. It was gone before he could get confirmation.

"He is special to me, too," Drift murmured. "He is the hope for Cybertron. At least, for Autobots, he is. Perhaps this hope will stem from a warlord's change of spark. Stranger things have happened." He started to pass him, but stopped when they were parallel. "That had better be the case," he threatened before walking out onto the balcony and descending the building.

Megatron found Hot Rod's optics, holding his gaze silently for a moment. "You have nothing to worry about, Drift."

They met halfway in a fervent kiss, their hands gripping and shifting. They would not be sated until they explored every inch of the others' frame. Memories were released at each gentle caress. Hands found home as sun and moon collided in a beautiful eclipse for two.

"How is it you can sneak into the Sanctuary without being seen, and then you waltz right in here without even checking to make sure that I am alone?" Despite Hot Rod's happiness at reuniting with his beloved, that situation could have turned south at any moment.

Megatron stroked at Hot Rod's cheek, and the anger he didn't truly feel fled to be replaced with a smile. "Perhaps I just wanted to meet your amica."

Hot Rod sighed and shook his helm. "It's fine. It's done. Just be more careful. I could have lost you."

"You had control of that situation at every step," Megatron reassured him. "If I could have met him-- or should I say be re-introduced?-- under normal circumstances, I would have." He gave him a sassy grin. "And I see you have a thing for Decepticons. I do not know whether to be offended or delighted that you chose me."

"Drift is not a Decepticon," Hot Rod said, a little cross.

"Is there something *wrong* with being a Decepticon?"

Hot Rod sputtered out what was supposed to be the beginning of words that would lead to a coherent sentence, but all they ended up being were noises. Noises to which Megatron chuckled at.

"You are fun to tease," Megatron said before kissing Hot Rod's neck and making him forget what they'd been talking about. A caress along his spoiler furthered his amnesia.

What Hot Rod's processor did manage to remember was the warm tingling of Megatron's hands on his frame. A feeling that Hot Rod wanted to experience on every inch of his plating.

Hot Rod gave Megatron a suggestive look as he took a step towards his berth. He followed without resistance, lightly holding Hot Rod's hand.

Hot Rod maintained optic contact as he crawled backwards up the berth, trying to look as seductive as he could. He held his ventilations as Megatron, too, crawled up over him. Their plating almost brushed, but not quite, leaving Hot Rod in shaking anticipation for when Megatron finally lay a kiss upon his chest. He shuddered, and Megatron was sure to leave more kisses before Hot Rod was finished.

Lifting his arms above his helm, Hot Rod arched his back so Megatron could slip a hand beneath him, which he took full advantage of. "Take me. Make me yours. I want to give as much of myself to you as I am able, while I am able to."

"Hmm..." Megatron placed gentle kisses along his neck and collar, bringing gasps forth from his heated vents. "I am not sure that is a good impression to impose upon your amica."

"What?"

"Did you really think he would leave you alone with me?" Megatron shook his helm with a smile.

"No. He is still here."

"Drift!"

No answer.

"Get out of here!"

"And you think him foolish enough to reveal where he is hiding." Megatron shook his helm, ending it with an affectionate nuzzle. "My dear Hot Rod, you grow cuter by the moment."

Hot Rod gave a huff, pouting, and wiggled out from under Megatron. He crossed the room and burst out onto the balcony, ready to give Drift a piece of his processor. After all, going to the party had been *his* idea. If he had just taken him out to drink, he wouldn't be here. Really, it was all his fault. But all he found was the cool night air and the pale touch of the moonlight. Not another bot in sight, Drift or otherwise.

Megatron laughed from the berth. "Oh, you will not find him. I trained him far too well. A shame. Deadlock was one of my most proficient warriors. Now he wastes his time and skills by hiding in this 'Sanctuary.'"

"Stop being such an Ultra Magnus!" Hot Rod yelled, only enough to carry his voice a little farther, then angrily slammed the doors. "No one ever just lets me live my life the way *I* want to!" He flopped back down on the berth face-down and groaned.

Megatron chuckled as he rolled over onto his side and lightly stroked Hot Rod's spoiler. It twitched at the touch.

"I think I am beginning to understand. I am just a part of your little rebellious streak before you have to give it all up."

"No!" Hot Rod, too, rolled onto his side, facing Megatron. "No, it's not like that at all!"

Following a smile, Megatron kissed Hot Rod's nose. "I am glad." He cradled his helm, his fingers making gentle strokes on his finials. "I know that you will lead me to a broken spark, but I had hoped it would not be so soon."

"I would never..." Hot Rod trailed off and let his gaze fall. "I do not want to break your spark."

"It is too late for me, Hot Rod." He pulled him in for a kiss, lingering, a sigh seeping from his vents. He pulled away, just enough to feel a draft on his lips, and then right back in, really savouring him. He shook his helm a little as he pulled away again. "Far too late. It was too late the moment I laid optics on you."

Hot Rod put his forehelm against Megatron's, nudging it just a little with a sad look on his face.

"My dear, it pains me to see you so upset."

"I don't want to hurt you." Hot Rod's voice pricked with static.

Megatron shook his helm again. "I pursued you. I had the choice to leave you alone and have your fun at that party. I went to you. I brought this upon myself. But I would make the same decision day after day after day after day. Not once would I leave such a breathtaking creature alone on the dance floor. I see my fate, and I accept it with open arms. I could not change it even if I tried, so why should I fight it?"

"Fate is... unavoidable," Hot Rod whispered sadly.

A silence so full it was suffocating fell over them. Their heated vents didn't help the stifling atmosphere, either. Hot Rod thought that maybe their true fate was to overheat, wrapped up in each others' embrace. He could think of worse ways to go.

"Let us not waste this night," Megatron suggested. "There is something I want to show you."

"Where are we going?" Hot Rod asked once they were in their alt modes. He drove slowly so that Megatron could keep up. Though he couldn't help but speed ahead and then drive back around beside Megatron. His tires itched to feel the burn and his engine practically *whined* from the lack of a challenge.

Megatron's chuckle translated to a deep rumble from his engine. "You will see in good time, my dear."

"But where is it?" Hot Rod continued to pester, driving circles around Megatron.

"Impatient, aren't you?"

"I like to know where people are taking me," Hot Rod said.

"It is just inside of Kaon, and that is all I will say of it."

"Kaon?" Hot Rod's engine faltered, but that just gave Megatron time to catch up to him. He sped back up, skidding a bit in embarrassment.

"Is the next in line afraid of the Decepticon capital?" Megatron asked smugly.

Hot Rod scoffed. "Yeah, right. I walked right into the *heart* of your capital and walked out with their leader!"

"Even with that Autobot symbol on your hood?"

Braking hard and skidding on the loose terrain, Hot Rod swiftly transformed, removed the symbol and tucked it away in his subspace, and returned back to alt mode before Megatron could get too far ahead. He caught the tail end of Megatron's chuckle as he caught up.

"Relax, my dear. We will be going to a rather unpopulated sector. One I have not visited in some time."

Hot Rod did excited circles around Megatron. "Can you tell me more?"

Megatron made an amused noise. "I am afraid I must leave you curious."

"But--"

"And that is all I will say of any more questions regarding our destination."

Hot Rod groaned and turned his frustrations to speeding ahead then pulling a tight u-turn and speeding right back. He kept this up until he saw the hazy glow of Kaon on the horizon. After that he found his engine to be too noisy, and pattered along beside Megatron.

"Are you *sure* you are not afraid?" Megatron teased. "My little fireball is flickering."

"I'm just keeping pace with you, old man," Hot Rod teased right back.

"Old man?" Megatron chuckled. "I will show you how old I am in just a short time."

"Was that supposed to be a threat? Because it sounds like you're going to show me how to apply a rust-proof undercoat."

Somehow Megatron managed to pull ahead of him and block his path. Hot Rod stopped just short of him as Megatron transformed, and he joined him in root mode.

"Could an old man do *this*?" Megatron dipped a surprised Hot Rod, smirking into the kiss. As quickly as he had done so, he returned to his alt mode and sped off as fast as his tank treads were able. Which, when compared to a still Hot Rod, seemed quite fast, but once he was back on his wheels, he quickly caught up and overtook him, laughing all the while.

"There he is," Megatron said affectionately. Though Hot Rod couldn't hear him over the roar of his engine. He settled down again once Kaon changed from being a distant singularity to a cluster of buildings that seemed to grow by the second. Before he knew it, their tires and treads found actual maintained road. Well, as maintained as war would allow, but it was far better than the rusty wasteland and only made Hot Rod's tires itch that much more.

"These streets could be yours." Megatron took to the outside of a turn to steer his paramour in the right direction. "A simple switch of sides, and I could give you everything you desire and more."

"Tempting me with riches, are you?" Hot Rod sidled over until he could just graze his side against

Megatron's.

"I was thinking more along the lines of a racetrack, but if riches tempt you then riches I will offer." Megatron nudged Hot Rod's bumper towards where the road seemed to fall away. "There. The tunnel. That is our destination."

"A tunnel?" Hot Rod slowed almost to a stop.

"The real threats are aboveground," Megatron said. "In fact, I can all but guarantee that there is not one soul down this road, but eventually someone will find you hanging about up here, and they will surely discover your true allegiance without your *well thought-out* disguise. The choice is yours."

Megatron continued on into the tunnel, and Hot Rod followed before he came to a full stop.

Unbeknownst to the pair, a seeker trine flew by overhead. Too high up to be seen by any grounder, but well within the range of sharp seeker optics. Red points of light that flared with anger when they saw the pair disappear into a tunnel.

"Another day," the leader said to his subordinates. "Soon, but not today."

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Hot Rod switched on his headlights after only travelling a few lengths down the tunnel. There were lights along the walls, but they either no longer functioned, or no one cared enough to keep them on.

Where was Megatron taking him?

Years of conditioning made him cautious, and the darkness even more so. It wasn't long before it swallowed them up and they relied solely on Hot Rod's headlights, though Megatron seemed to know the way well enough not to need them. He made turns before Hot Rod even saw the corridors.

"Where are we going?" Hot Rod asked again, much more timidly this time.

"We are almost there."

Not a moment later and Hot Rod was skidding to a stop as his optic sensors were blinded by the sudden light. Megatron grunted, too, and he heard him transform.

Assuming his root mode and shielding his optics, Hot Rod said, "Couldn't have given us a warning, huh?"

"I apologize. I thought since the tunnel sensors were not on, these would not be either."

Hot Rod blinked fast, hearing more than seeing Megatron take a few steps forward.

"Over here, my love. I have something for you."

Hot Rod followed the sound of his voice and pedesteps, now able to squint, but only able to distinguish shapes.

"Hold out your hands," Megatron instructed.

"What is this place?" Hot Rod asked. "A base or something?"

Megatron chuckled. "Did you think I would lead the next leader of the Autobots right into a Decepticon base? Here. It is not yours, per se, but it is yours for now."

Hot Rod grabbed the thing and yelped when it cut into the palm of one of his hands. Blinking hard against the harsh white light, he finally saw some things. The first thing being the *sword*? Megatron had given him a *sword*? One of many from the wall, it seemed.

"I usually recommend that you only hold it by the hilt," Megatron chuckled. He stooped down to inspect Hot Rod's hand. "The cut is not deep. You will survive."

"Why are you giving me this?" Hot Rod asked.

Megatron then picked a rusting shield off of the wall. Turning back to Hot Rod, he said, "As I said, it is not yours to keep, as it is not mine to give. It is not of a quality that I would gift to you, anyways, but you would not give a new artist the finest canvas to practice on for the same reason you do not give a warrior-in-training a masterpiece of weaponry."

Training? *Warrior?*

"How are you expected to take on Decepticons, *highly trained* Decepticons, when you have not even handled a weapon?" Megatron held the shield out to Hot Rod, who went on autopilot amongst the confusion and accepted it without question. He nodded as he regarded him. "Yes, I could see it. Flames across the shield, red gems on the hilt. I will have them fashioned for you."

"Woah, woah, wait!" Suddenly the sword and shield felt very heavy. "You're teaching me to *fight?*"

Megatron smiled. "Naturally. Since it is clear that Optimus is not."

"It is for my own good," Hot Rod repeated the same things he'd been told every time he asked. Eventually he'd just stopped asking. "It would not do Cybertron any good if I got hurt."

"Did they expect you to pick it up after your first battle?"

"They say I will gain all the wisdom of the Primes, including Optimus' memories up to that point. Perhaps I will know how to fight through him?" Voice becoming unsure, Hot Rod looked at Megatron as if he held the answers.

Megatron shook his helm in disbelief. "Fools. How have I not defeated your kind when your plans rely on hope and potentials?"

Hot Rod bowed his helm under the weight of Megatron's rhetorical question and some sort of strange guilt. They all weighed so heavily upon him. He would prefer only to be asked questions he was supposed to answer.

"Never mind all that," Megatron said far more gently. "Chin up, shoulders back, chest out! A warrior does not cower under the optics of his foe."

Hot Rod lifted his helm, but that was the only order he followed. "Is there a training bot or are we just covering the basics?"

The sword Megatron chose left the wall with a satisfying *shing*. "Where's the fun in that?" He held it aloft, testing its weight. "What better way is there to learn how to fight a Decepticon, then by fighting a Decepticon?"

Hot Rod's face blanched. "*You?*"

Megatron took a shield for himself down next. "Ahh..." He closed his optics as he took a fighting stance. "It has been too long. War may give me many opportunities to battle, but seldom a worthy adversary. I must admit, I wish you could have been a special guest to one of my gladiatorial matches, but these Pits have been empty for some time." He met Hot Rod's gaze with a sultry look, as if being here excited him. "You would have feasted on the richest energon while lounging in the finest box the arena had to offer. Nothing but the best for a gladiator's lover."

"Spectator, perhaps, but gladiator?" Hot Rod forcibly shook his helm. He could not lose himself in the fantasy as Megatron had. Not while such heavy weights befell his trembling hands. "I will be no more a worthy adversary than a foot soldier!"

"For now, perhaps," Megatron said. "Give it time, and a few more lessons, and I am sure you will shape up to be a warrior to rival even me."

"Megatron, I, I do not have time for all of that! And..." Hot Rod shook his helm. "I cannot even

defend myself against an MTO, let alone you!"

"Worry not, my dear. What good am I as your protector if I hurt you?" Hot Rod held very still as Megatron stepped towards him and planted a kiss on his forehead. "I will only defend until I feel you are ready to block my blows."

"I do not know if I can do this." Hot Rod's hands shook despite the heavy battle gear in both.

"This is not the Hot Rod I know." Megatron circled around behind him, one arm encircling his waist and the other stroking up his arm to his hand, clutched tightly around the hilt of the sword. "The Hot Rod I fell in love with wasn't afraid of walking into a Decepticon party--nor did he cower in the face of his enemy. But a sword in his hand and he loses all resolve?" Megatron tightened his grip around Hot Rod's fist. "Did I overestimate you, my son?"

Hot Rod bit his lip.

"Well, I will just have to give you some *very* hands-on training. Let's start with your stance." Megatron put a pede between Hot Rod's legs and nudged his right pede out further. "Bend your knees. You want to be light on your pedes. You must be able to change direction at a moment's notice."

Hot Rod listened intently to the instructions as Megatron pushed and pulled at his frame until he was in the position he wanted him in.

"Alright," Megatron said once he was satisfied. He released Hot Rod, who held the stance stiffly, then circled back in front of him, picking up a shield of his own. "Try to hit me," he said as he turned to him.

Hot Rod stayed frozen. "Just...?"

"You cannot do anything wrong here. There are no rules in battle, Hot Rod. You just need to train to make sure that you land the winning blow rather than taking it."

Megatron thought for a moment. "Imagine I'm a big bad Decepticon and I've just invaded your little Sanctuary, and you are the last line of defense. Are you going to just stand there and wait for me to find a weapon? Or are you going to attack me first?"

"You are not that scary," Hot Rod teased.

"Then it should be easy to breach my defenses, yes?" Megatron's mouth slowly curled into a smile.

Taking a quick ventilation, Hot Rod swung the sword. Megatron easily deflected it, and Hot Rod had to take a moment to recover from the recoil.

"Good power," Megatron praised. "But you put too much weight into it. That's why you stumbled back. You have to be prepared for every hit to be blocked, and that way you will be ready to strike again. Now," he chuckled, "*strike again.*"

Hot Rod tensed his frame, meeting Megatron's optics for just a moment before throwing himself at Megatron again. This time, when sword met shield, Hot Rod prepared himself for the recoil. Still, the force threw him back, though not so much. He recovered before Megatron could repeat his lesson, and swung again before he could say another word.

"That's it!" Megatron grunted when he was forced to push back with his shield. "Give me all you've got!"

The more Hot Rod trained, the bigger his smile grew. Soon enough his grin spread far enough to make his cheeks ache in the way his frame would the next day. A smarter Hot Rod, perhaps one not so high on an adrenaline rush, would have worried about future excuses, but this Hot Rod had veins full of fire and a processor high on the rush.

"Don't aim for the shield," Megatron instructed, not showing any signs of weakening stamina, whereas Hot Rod panted, his fans working hard to cool his frame. "Aim for where it *isn't*. It's my job to--" He had to move quickly to block Hot Rod's sword when he did just that. "Excellent," Megatron praised with a chuckle. "You are a quick study, my dear."

"You are a good teacher." Hot Rod held his sword and shield in a way he thought would look cool. He waited until he saw an amused look cross Megatron's face, then attacked again, catching him off-guard.

Megatron cried out in pain as the blade caught his abdomen and drew energon. Hot Rod's sword formed a magenta arc as he pulled it back ready to swing again, but dropped it with a gasp as he realized what he had done. The wound had Megatron dropping to one knee, and Hot Rod ran to him, skidding to a stop on his knees.

"Megatron! I'm so sorry, are you okay?" Hot Rod's hands hovered over the one Megatron held over his seeping wound.

A grin spread across Megatron's face before he succumbed to a boisterous laugh.

"That's the spirit!" he praised him. "A warrior will take any opening that he can." Smiling warmly, he added, "I'm so proud of you."

Energon oozed out beneath Megatron's fingers.

"Doesn't that hurt?" Hot Rod fret.

"No more than it should. I can think of a multitude of battles where I came out worse for wear." When the worried look persisted on Hot Rod's face, he reassured him, "You must have hit a main line. I have left here with wounds walking the line of fatality and still survived to see the next fight. Really, Hot Rod, you should have kept fighting. I still can."

"I do not want to do this anymore," Hot Rod decided firmly. "Not if it means hurting you. I will not need to know how to fight, right?"

Uncertain red optics silently met hopeful blue.

"Let me patch you up," Hot Rod said once discomfort twisted at his tank. Megatron assured him that he could do it himself, but Hot Rod insisted. Focusing on the task at hand kept the pressing weight of reality off of his spark.

Scars littered Megatron's plating. Hot Rod remembered seeing some during the party, but certainly not this many. Once healed, his infliction would be lost among the marks. Such a stark contrast to Hot Rod's plating. It wasn't pristine, but it was damn near close. Especially compared to his lover's.

A warlord and a Prime.

"No one calls Optimus a warlord," Hot Rod mused allowed as he applied a bandage to Megatron's arm.

"No one considers him one," Megatron answered as though it were obvious.

"But he is one, isn't he?"

Megatron considered his words for a moment. "I suppose that statement is not... *inaccurate*. But you must remember, my dear Hot Rod, no one wants to look in the mirror and see themselves as the villain. Everyone is a hero in their own processor."

"My processor must not function properly," Hot Rod said quietly.

"Do you think it is helpful for Optimus to see himself as a hero?" Megatron asked.

Hot Rod paused in his work, his fingers just touching the bandage. "What do you mean?"

"Let me ask you this, then: do you consider Optimus to be a hero?"

"Of course I do! He's... he's Optimus. He just..." Hot Rod frowned while he thought. "He is a hero."

"To whom?"

"Can we not have this conversation?" Hot Rod snapped. His face flushed hot with embarrassment and he focused far more attention on tending to Megatron's wound than was necessary. "Optimus does what needs to be done."

"So you think that fighting against me is 'what needs to be done?'"

"Please, Megatron?" Hot Rod met his optics for only a moment, because he couldn't handle seeing the hurt there. He whispered, "I do not want to have this conversation with you. You want me to be a Decepticon. Everyone expects me to be an Autobot. I do not know which choice is the right one, or if perhaps both are, somehow, equally wrong and right at the same time. Regardless, I do not truly have this choice. Like it or not, in three days' time I will be Prime. I will be an Autobot. It will be more than just a symbol on my chest. I will likely be your enemy. I..."

Hot Rod's hands stopped working, not that he had been making much progress while he had been speaking. He rested his helm against Megatron's chest. "It is all so much. Please do not force me to re-evaluate Optimus, too. Even if I should."

Megatron was silent for some time. Hot Rod grew worried that his wound went deeper than Megatron admitted, but when he looked into his optics he still found him there, though faraway.

"Alright, my dear," he finally said. "I will not ask you any more difficult questions, on one condition."

"What condition?" Hot Rod asked cautiously, though he hoped for something romantic in nature. What he got, though, was a pair of hard red optics.

"You listen to me explain why I am who I am."

Chapter End Notes

Please note the warnings change! It won't be until chapter 13/14 and I don't know if what I'm writing qualifies, but better safe than sorry.

Chapter 9

"I witnessed death long before the war," Megatron began. "Perhaps not on the same scale, but often enough to numb myself to it."

Energon still leaked a rivulet down Megatron's abdomen, but Hot Rod found his hands leaving the source to hold Megatron's hand, squeezing it tightly. He couldn't rid himself of his sympathetic look, even when Megatron frowned at him.

"The mines are a horrendous place." Megatron's free hand went to the floor. "I have yet to find myself in a worse place, and I would not wish a miner's treatment on even Optimus." He shook his helm, a faraway look in his optics. "Each of us knew that all it would take was to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, and we would be replaced by whoever rolled off the assembly line next. That kept us complacent, as well, or else that wrong place and time might have been imposed on us in a barely hidden murder scheme."

Hot Rod's grip tightened to the point of pain for both parties.

"You learned not to get too attached to anyone," Megatron continued. "I came quite close to being caught in a cave-in or a poorly executed detonation. Though those taken that way were the lucky ones. You see, our superiors, as they liked to think themselves, depended on a certain number of deaths. They were only allotted a certain percentage of the energon we mined, and when we experienced a shortage, some went without. Those were the unfortunates who were forced to work until their sparks gave out. Theirs were the faces I remember. The pained and exhausted look frozen on their face when they collapsed. *Those* are the faces I see in my nightmares, not the ones felled by my own hands on the battlefield.

"Hot Rod... I may have killed, but I killed in the name of freedom. Every single bot who ordered those ration cuts could have paid to keep them alive. And those 'accidents'? Merely a lack of training. They were the young ones--often the ones who had not even named themselves yet--whose sparks had not fully bonded to their frames. The ones with the smiles that showed that they had not seen the world yet. I would say they were laid to rest with at least their identification number on their marker, but I am not that naive. They were melted down and reused. I have no doubts that my own plating had been constructed from fallen miners and other replaceables."

Megatron shook his helm. "Because of this, a lot of miners experienced dysphoria, and some did not survive the experience." Megatron clenched his fists, his optics flaring to an almost white. "And they *encouraged* suicide. Anyone considering death did not meet their quota, and the supervisors would hover over them, telling them to give up. Some of us tried to talk them out of the ideas imposed on them... It rarely worked. We had little time to talk, and they had the entire shift to think and hear those same thoughts roll off the glossa of those who were meant to *protect us*!" Megatron bellowed, his deep voice echoing off the walls like rolling thunder.

"Megatron, please..." Hot Rod gently covered his wound, leaking more under the stress, with his hand. "Do not let past angers hurt your present."

"*You should know!*" Megatron snarled.

Hot Rod couldn't help but flinch.

Megatron sucked in a sharp ventilation that served to siphon off his rage, but the underlying anger remained. "Past, present... It is all the same. Anger fuels me. If I forget why I fight, I will forget

why I must keep going. Why I cannot give up even when my frame begs for rest. Millions of years have passed since I have been forced below ground, but I must remember the experience as though it happened but a day before. It keeps my wits sharp."

"Why--" Hot Rod bit his glossa, literally and figuratively, but Megatron just watched him as calmly as he was able then.

"Speak your mind, my dear," Megatron murmured. He took a deep ventilation and took both of Hot Rod's energon-soaked hands in his, looking at them for a while before he spoke again. "I only wished to tell you why I started the war. Why I have come this far... Why I cannot turn back. My view is biased, I will admit that, but is Optimus' any better?"

Hot Rod didn't answer him, and Megatron didn't expect him to.

"I want to show you both sides so that you may be able to decide where your sympathies lie. I will answer your questions, so long as you listen to all I have to say. Especially the atrocities. They are the hardest to listen to, but it is important that you know of them so that you will not tread the same path."

Hot Rod waited a moment more, and once he was sure Megatron was done, he asked quietly, "Why would the Autobots fight against this? That is a worthy cause. A noble one. I thought we fought *for* freedom." He looked at his hands.

Megatron sighed. "I am afraid war is never as simple as that. Nor is my relationship to Optimus..."

"What?" Hot Rod cocked his helm.

"He never told you, then?" Megatron assumed.

"Told me what?"

"Optimus and I were once friends."

"*What?!*"

"Is it really so surprising?" Megatron asked, smiling just a little, though it was short-lived. He averted his optics. "Perhaps to someone like you, it would be. Yes, we were friends. Comrades, even. Set on the same path, for a while. Each of us saw the corruption, and each wanted change." His gaze shifted sideways to look at Hot Rod. "I will not bore you with our tragic back story. Just know that, for a while, we shared the same goal. 'What went wrong?'"

Megatron smiled while Hot Rod shut his mouth, looking sheepish.

"That is the question everyone wants the answer to," Megatron said, amused. "The simplest of answers that I can give you is that we disagreed on methods. Optimus wished to use words. He wished to use non-violent means to appeal to the senators."

"Isn't that... good?"

"If senators were open to new ideas, certainly," Megatron replied, just barely veiling his sarcasm. "Hot Rod, am I correct in assuming that you were not long from the Well when Optimus came for you?"

Hot Rod nodded.

"And you have been sheltered all your life..." Megatron shook his helm. "No wonder you are confused. Well, my dear, senators and Functionists are often one and the same, and are of a higher caste than most. Only a Prime and a select few others rank above them. Naturally, when one is on top, they have to worry about someone below them rising above them, or they could find themselves at the bottom of the system they created. The one *they* tailored to favour those higher up. The same one that disfavors those in the lowest castes. Now, wouldn't *you* want to ensure that your way of life was not compromised?"

Megatron didn't wait for Hot Rod's answer. "The Functionists thrive on a Prime; the living embodiment of Primus. They are meant to remind us that our form serves our function. Primus chooses our Primes, just as he chooses our forms. Which, of course, begs the question: what about those who are Constructed Cold? Well, would Primus make the science possible if it was not to be?" Megatron regarded Hot Rod, who couldn't bring himself to look him in the optic. "Optimus likes to think he is fighting for freedom, and yet he keeps even you trapped. He has confined you to what he thinks a Prime should be, but Cybertron does not need another Optimus. Cybertron needs a leader who will think for himself. One who will examine all angles and decide what interest best serves his people. What kind of Prime can look at himself in the mirror and tell himself that he is accomplishing that, when those most vulnerable are *suffering*?"

Hot Rod curled in on himself, holding his helm, smearing energon over it in the process.

Megatron started to reach for him. "Hot Rod--"

"I cannot meet either of your expectations!" Hot Rod all but screamed, shaking. "I cannot be like Optimus, but I cannot find an end to this war, either! And I fear that any decision I make will lose me the one thing that feels *so right*." His voice grew quieter the more the words tumbled out. He ended with his hands moving down to clutch at his pounding spark--fresh energon covering where his Autobot badge should be.

"I do not wish to overwhelm you, Hot Rod," Megatron murmured, and somehow his voice could still be heard over Hot Rod's restless spark. "But I am afraid you are out of time to hide in your room and wish that this responsibility is not yours. I can provide you with some comfort, I hope. My dear, my love, my beautiful sun..." He waited until Hot Rod unfurled. Until he could see his dim blue optics.

He retook his hand, rubbing it with his thumb. "No one is ever prepared for greatness, even if you have been preparing for it your whole life. You are not prepared now, and you will not be prepared even once the Matrix has settled in your chest." He swallowed, and Hot Rod didn't miss how his last few words had to be said around the lump in his throat. "I imagine if you ask Optimus, and he were truly honest with you, he would tell you that he is *still* not ready for the task that is all but behind him now."

"But I *have* to be ready!" Hot Rod threw himself upon Megatron, who grunted with pain and held Hot Rod away from his wound. "I'm sorry," he whispered, but couldn't bring himself to pull away.

"What is a bit of my own pain to alleviate some of yours?" Megatron murmured. He sighed. "Is there nothing that can stop this?" he asked, barely audible.

Hot Rod hid more of his face from his beloved as Megatron voiced the thought that preoccupied his processor more and more as the days grew short. He shook, but Megatron saw to it that his shakes were grounded in his frame.

"It matters not," Megatron murmured. "Let us not concern ourselves with what cannot be changed, and rather with what we can do with each other. Whatever will bring us comfort in the here and

now, and, if we are lucky, what will bring us comfort in the future--where my arms cannot reach you." He hugged him tighter and kissed his forehead. "Where my lips cannot kiss you. Where my words are whisked away by the wind and are no more than a whisper too quiet for your audials."

"My spark will hear you," Hot Rod whispered. "It is always listening for your call."

"Can you hear it now?" Megatron's fingers brushed Hot Rod's chin. "With your helm to my chest, you must hear its shouting."

His spark did indeed pound by Hot Rod's audial--loud and lovingly. "I can." He rested a hand alongside his helm, relaxing in his hold. "I hear your love."

"Does it bring you calm?" Megatron asked quietly, ever so lightly stroking Hot Rod's energon-streaked finials.

Hot Rod nodded. "More than anything ever has."

"Then know that it will continue to do so even when it feels like the world is crumbling around you." He coaxed Hot Rod's helm into tilting up to look at him. "My spark will always be here to comfort you, my love. Through thick and thin, through every trial and tribulation that life will throw your way, it will still be here. Beating for you. *Loving* you, in everything you do, in greatness or not. Though I am more certain that the former will be your fate."

Hot Rod shook his helm, trying to retreat, but Megatron stopped him from doing so.

"Those are future matters," Megatron murmured. "Now, I regret, I must take you home. The night draws to a close."

"Must we part so soon?"

"My dear..." Megatron started to stand, and because he refused to fully part with his beloved, Hot Rod rose, too. Once on their pedes, he cupped Hot Rod's cheek. "I would give us as many hours as could be had, but even then you would find that infinity does have an end, and you will find that that end comes too swiftly."

Hot Rod bowed his helm. "Alright."

"But you will permit me to see you again, yes? Tomorrow? As early as you can manage, if you will have me. The night is a wonderful time, and a blessing to be able to hold you in my arms at all, but the morning is much closer, and I already feel the pain of separation. Will you spare me this torment, my love?" Megatron got down on one knee, holding Hot Rod's one hand in both of his. "I promise that it will be more than worth your while."

"The night shields us, my love." Hot Rod rested his free hand on top of Megatron's. "It gives us the cover we require. When you and I are assumed asleep and are not required elsewhere."

"Where are you required?" Megatron asked. "When day breaks, who will fetch you and for what purpose? I will find you at your first available hour, and not a minute later. I will ravish you in the kisses that you have missed throughout the hours passed."

Hot Rod's gaze turned sad. "Our love is not so simple."

"And that is why it is so precious."

Hot Rod sighed. "My schedule is not so rigid that it cannot bend to meet your request, but my

dear..." He shook his helm. "I am unsure as to which words must be spoken to Magnus to ensure that you will find me safely. When he assumes me asleep in my berth, explanations are simple. But the day is for prayer. For study. And as of late, for preparation. He will deem any other use of my time unworthy, and all of our planning will have been for naught."

"Then say that you will pray. Is there not a temple where they will leave you in peace to commune?"

"There is, but--"

"I will hear no excuses that will keep me from you. The temple shall know of our love, for it is as holy as any can be, for a Prime loves his people, and to bestow more love on one than another must mean that our love is the most deserving of Primus' approval." Megatron rose to stand on his pedes once more, bringing Hot Rod's hand to his mouth so that he may lay a tender kiss upon it.

Hot Rod bit his lip then released it along with all the air from his intake. "Alright. You will find me in the temple three hours after daybreak, and not a moment earlier. Tread lightly, my love. Many more souls beyond ours will be out seeking the sun."

"They will not find me," Megatron promised, tilting Hot Rod's chin up. "The threat of never again feeling the touch of your lips will aid in my stealth."

Once he was back in the safety of his room, alone once more, Hot Rod took to his washracks to clean Megatron's spilled energon from his frame. He stared as the pink fluid swirled down the drain and let out a long-suffering sigh.

Before his frame had even dried, Hot Rod threw himself onto his berth, wincing slightly as he finally realized how sore his frame was from Megatron's training. However, the pain was welcome, as it reminded him of time spent with the one he loved.

Not even bothering to pull the covers over himself, Hot Rod let himself fall into recharge as the stars began to dim and the sun let its first breath whisper over the horizon.

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

I'm posting this chapter early because my friend Allyson is a wonderful person. Thank you and I love you <3

For the first time ever, Ultra Magnus smiled.

His huge hands on Hot Rod's back, he beamed as he ushered the Prime to-be to the Temple of the Matrix, where Hot Rod had told him he would spend the day praying and practicing for the ceremony. They couldn't have gotten there faster on their wheels.

Hot Rod's heels burned from the friction, but he was glad for the excuse to step lightly, as even then the sound of his movements echoed around the impossibly big chamber, returning to his audials as if there was a completely different bot there with him. Not yet, though, he had been sure to leave a large window of time between his arrival and Megatron's, which left him with far too much time to be alone with himself. The walls seemed to echo back even one's own thoughts.

Hot Rod knelt before the altar, but there the quiet only served to aggravate his anxiety. Here, where a beam of sunlight found him through the skylight, was said to be the loudest place for any disciple of Primus. And in a way, it was. Only here did Hot Rod become painfully aware of his sparkbeat. Faster and faster it pounded in his audials. He hoped a desperate hope that it was simply drowning out the whispers from just beyond their mortal realm.

Not once had Primus whispered in his audial, nor any past Prime, for that matter. Optimus' recounts of the many times he had heard the word of the ancients left Hot Rod to believe that this was another failure, and another sign, that the title of "Prime" should not belong to him.

How could he stand before his people and tell them that he was the vessel of Primus if he could not hear him? How could he lead them, knowing that he was a fraud? How could he even accept the newly-refilled Matrix if he was not worthy of its power? Would it even accept him? What would happen if it rejected him? Would he even live to see the answer?

If only Hot Rod had come up with a better excuse to be left alone.

He stood, suddenly preferring pacing, even though the eerie echoes unnerved him. Everything about this place unnerved him. He wondered if the presence of the Matrix would help, once it had settled in his chest. Maybe then it would feel right.

Glancing back at the altar, he found himself drawn to it. Not in the way Optimus or everyone else wanted, but... drawn. His hand hesitated over the ornate gold trim. Such a beautiful thing. But, really, it was just a thing. Without the Matrix, nothing about this place was holy. He really shouldn't be afraid of it.

Hot Rod started by resting a shaking finger on it. When nothing happened, he rested another and then another, until his palm touched it, too. Just a thing. An ordinary, if beautiful, thing. And still, no voices. Not a thing met his audials.

"Hot Rod..."

"Yes?" Hot Rod cast his optics heavenward. He had no idea what he expected to find, but nothing was not it. He had to resist the urge to climb the pedestal to better see what might be hiding in the highest shadows. Still, he stretched up onto the fore of his pedes. "What do you need to tell me?"

Nothing. The pedestal looked more tempting by the second.

"Please." Hot Rod's gaze dropped to the altar. "Tell me what I need to do. I feel so lost..."

"Hot Rod?"

That voice came from behind him. Whipping around, he saw a looming figure in the doorway.

"H-hello?" Should he approach them? Bow? He'd never been approached by a Prime other than Optimus. He may be able to treat Optimus differently than the regular public, but not other Primes. Not that he'd ever met one. Or expected to.

The bot took a step inside, closing the door behind them. "It is you." Stepping into the light, Hot Rod saw their broad shoulders, backed with treads. He followed the swirling pattern on their chest until he found the violet symbol of sharp lines and harsh angles.

"Oh," Hot Rod gave a sigh of relief while his optics dimmed with disappointment, "it is just you, Megatron." He frowned at him, despite his happiness. "You are early."

"I am sorry, my dear." He glanced around the room, his steps becoming more confident the more empty he found it. "I could not wait one more moment to see you." Without any hesitation, he took a smiling Hot Rod into his arms, giving him a chaste kiss. "I haven't put you in any danger, have I?"

"You should worry about yourself," Hot Rod said. "But you would not have been able to get in here if someone had seen you." He still cast a wary glance at the door. "I think we will be okay."

"As long as you are safe." Megatron cupped his cheek. "That is all that matters."

"My safety is of little importance if it forces you into danger." Hot Rod rested his hand over Megatron's and spread his fingers. He gave it a little nuzzle. "If only there was some place we could go where neither of us would have to tread on enemy territory."

"Or holy ground." Megatron looked around warily, as if trying to follow his echo. "Are you sure it is wise for us to be here?"

"Wise?" Hot Rod laughed, and it took on an eerie feel the more he added to the echo. "Megatron, I have never done a wise thing in my life. But..." He sighed. "No one would dare disturb me. They think I am communing with the Primes."

"Oh." He gave another look around. "What's that like?"

"I... I..." Hot Rod sighed, his helm falling. "I would not know."

"But--"

"I know." He rested his forehelm against Megatron's chest. "What kind of Prime cannot communicate with the ancients? Believe me, I have been asking myself that ever since Optimus came to me. Everything I have been told a Prime should be--everything a Prime is *supposed* to be--I am *not*. And I can fake it well enough, and I can follow all of their rules--most of the time--but that

has nothing to do with my skills as a leader!" He raised his blue optics to meet red, biting his lip when he saw his distraught face reflected back at him. "I am sorry. I should not burden you with this."

Megatron's helm shook slowly as he leaned down to press a kiss to trembling lips. He lingered far longer than Hot Rod expected him to. How could this feel any good? But he kept them together for some time, and then kept his face near when he spoke, still staring at his lips. "You can tell me anything and everything. Nothing spoken from your lips could ever burden me. I could listen to you talk for all of eternity."

"You have two more nights," Hot Rod said sadly.

"Then someone should get talking." He smirked before delving in for another kiss. After he pulled back, he gave him a thoughtful look while gently stroking his cheek with the knuckle of his pointer finger. "Hot Rod, I love you. If something is troubling you, I want you to share it with me. It is far easier to share a burden, rather than attempt to shoulder such a weight on your own."

"I will not have the luxury of sharing the burden with anyone once I am made Prime. I must make all of the decisions, I need to, I need to be a leader, and I am not even a fraction of one! I am just... I am just... *me*."

Hot Rod squeaked as he was swept off his pedes.

"My love..." Megatron set him down on the altar, a place Hot Rod was sure had never felt the touch of a mech's aft. Then again, if what had already transpired in these holy walls was not sacrilegious, they were sure to disrupt such a peace, if not now, then soon. "If it is true that Primus chooses his Primes, then how could he have made a mistake?"

Avoiding Megatron's optics, which were now annoyingly at the same level as his, he mumbled, "I do not know." The sun beat down through the roof's opening, as if judging him. Bringing light to all of his flaws; nothing could be hidden from Megatron's optics.

Megatron's huge hand engulfed Hot Rod's, folded neatly in his lap. "Trust in Primus. And if it were not his doing, then surely Optimus must see greatness in you. The same greatness that *I* see in you."

"You should have your vision checked." Somewhere in his self-depreciation, he found some humour, and it bubbled to the surface in a giggle that turned into a full-on laugh when he caught Megatron's smile in his peripheries. He lifted his helm to share a laugh with his love, and Megatron used this chance to steal another kiss from him. He laughed into Megatron's mouth and wrapped his arms around his neck so he may taste the laughter on his lips for longer.

Eventually, he allowed Megatron a small escape. He let off on his grip, but only enough for Megatron to instead rest his forehelm against Hot Rod's.

"My sun will always shine," Megatron whispered. "And when he forgets how beautiful his light truly is, I will reflect it back to him so that he may know how he makes me feel whenever I am deigned to be in his company."

"You are as much of a sun as I am," Hot Rod murmured. "You have brought light to *my* life."

Megatron shook his helm. "It was always your light." He took a step away from the pedestal. Within reach, but Hot Rod made no attempt to bridge that gap. "I bring darkness."

"No you don't." Hot Rod tried to laugh it off, but Megatron's optics had dimmed as his helm had fallen. "Megatron?"

Slowly, those dim optics rose to meet Hot Rod's. "I was always told this was the hardest part," Megatron murmured, almost too low for Hot Rod's audials to pick up. "I doubt they ever knew just how hard it would be for me."

"What are you talking about?" Hot Rod asked, confused.

"I have no doubts that you have been told about my crimes," Megatron began, forcing his voice to reach Hot Rod. He left the regret where it manifested. "About what I have done. Of what I am beginning to see are atrocities that do not reflect the ideals I had hoped to achieve when I first wore what used to be our noble brand."

"Autobots are no better," Hot Rod murmured.

"Even if that were true, it does not change what *I* have done. It does not wash the spilt energon from my hands, and they are stained with more bots than you could have possibly been told. And yet here you are," Megatron let his hands rest upon Hot Rod's waist, "allowing me to tarnish your pure plating with my malevolence. Using those same hands, no less."

"Optimus is no less a war general than you." Hot Rod rested his own on Megatron's chest, framing the Decepticon symbol that still sat there. "And I am to be his successor. I am to become as tangled in war as any of you."

Regardless of the guilt Megatron felt, he still pulled Hot Rod closer. "I was the one who started the war."

"Without your push, Cybertron suffered. My faction is but a thing of unfortunate circumstance. Of Primus' intervention. If it were not for him, for my destiny, I would likely fly under your colours. Nothing would inhibit us from our love. But you chose your path and I had mine thrust upon me, and yet still we came together. If I believe in any sort of fate, I believe that it was fate for us to meet. For us to fall in love. And to deny you would be to deny that fate. We can move forward. We can find a way to better the world as you wanted to when you started this war. We can find a way to be together." He embraced him, his helm resting atop the symbol that divided them. "I refuse to give you up. I will find a way."

"We."

"Hm?" Hot Rod had to lean back to see Megatron's face.

Megatron stroked at Hot Rod's chin, even though it was already cant as high as he could manage. "*We* will find a way. From this day forth, you will never have to be alone again. I will be with you every step of the way, if not in frame, then in spirit. But I digress, for I need you to listen to my story. I have told you *why*, but I must also tell you *what*. I must show you how much of my side aligns with what you have been told. I need to ensure that you understand me from all angles before you dedicate yourself to me, if you still see that as the path you wish to take."

"Of course it is." Hot Rod reached for Megatron, but he dodged his hand, leaving his pained look mirrored on Hot Rod's face. "Megatron..."

"The first murders were the most difficult," Megatron continued. "You can tell yourself time and again that they are necessary, but..." He shook his helm. "Murders they remain. What you are not told, is how much more easily a blade will cut through armour as your death toll rises. I feel nothing now. I rarely felt *anything* for millennia until..." Megatron found his helm against Hot Rod's chest, taking comfort in his steady sparkbeat, and even more so when he felt gentle hands stroke his helm. "I am undeserving of your comfort."

"Well, too bad," Hot Rod decided.

"Killing is just another part of my life now." Megatron tore himself away to look at his hands. "As normal as refueling. As normal as *waking*."

"We are at war."

"*A war I started!*" Megatron's sudden roar echoed around them and compounded on them. The next time he spoke, his words barely broke a whisper. "How can you confess to love someone as vile as I?"

"Someone as vile as you claim to be cannot know love," Hot Rod murmured. "I have made my choice, Megatron. Is it the correct choice? I do not know. But I know that it *feels* right, and that, to me, is enough to keep treading down this path. With you. Megatron of Tarn, I love you. I will always love you." He opened his arms, leaning as far forward as he was able to without slipping from the pedestal. "I accept you. I accept you as you are now, and I can see the will to change within you. Now, please, accept my love. You are deserving of it."

A stressful silence fell over them. Megatron's dark and flickering optics looked from Hot Rod to his hands, and then up to the heavens, as if searching for a sign. Soon enough, like Hot Rod, he learned that there would be none coming, and it was inevitably his choice and his alone to make.

He chose to love.

Megatron held Hot Rod tightly. Hot Rod stroked his shaking helm, pressing a gentle kiss to his forehead as the shakes quelled. Shortly after, Megatron reaffirmed his grip on Hot Rod's waist and helped him down from the altar.

Megatron retrieved something from his subspace. He held it as carefully as he was able before him, revealing the dainty gold crown to Hot Rod. He gasped softly as he took in the three points, each ending on rubies.

"I hope it is to your liking," Megatron said as he placed it on top of Hot Rod's helm.

The points settled perfectly along his crest. It was as if it had simply grown and was budding with the rubies. The true magic of it, though, was how the tiny rubies along the rim, so small one could easily miss them, caught the sunlight and set a fire atop Hot Rod's helm.

"Megatron, I..." Hot Rod reached up tentatively, flinching when his fingertips brushed the edge of the most expensive thing that had ever touched his frame. "I, I cannot..."

Megatron reached back into his subspace, pulling forth the same crown he had been wearing the night they had first met. He placed it on his helm and then took hold of Hot Rod's hands.

He spoke in a voice meant only for Hot Rod, "You and I will be kings. A benevolent rule of Autobots and Decepticons alike. From the ashes of war we will grow a new empire. A *better* one. Where all have the choice to be whomever they choose to be. We will see our poisoned core restored to its former glory. We... *I* will restore our planet to its former glory. I will fix every mistake I have made."

Hot Rod shook his helm slowly, raising his hand to cup Megatron's cheek. "*We*," he corrected. "If you truly wish to rule with me, then I must aid you in fixing your mistakes."

"But it is my job to make them right," Megatron protested.

"Optimus has taught me that a leader must accept all his nation's problems as his own. True, they may not be his fault, but they are his to make right however he can. So, if we are to rule together, as a united front, then that is as much my burden to bear as it is yours."

Megatron watched him silently for a long while. "I am humbled by you. Humbled, and amazed that you do not see how worthy you are of the Matrix."

Hot Rod shook his helm. "No. I am simply channelling Optimus. He could have chosen anyone and they would have been just as worthy, if not more."

Chuckling, Megatron kissed where his forehelm met the crown. "Stubborn, aren't you? You are making this difficult."

"What?" Hot Rod cocked his helm in confusion.

Megatron knelt before him. "Hot Rod, my sun, I love you."

"This is... You are..."

"In the dying light of your life, or so you say, I must ask for your hand. I humbly request as your Moon, but a lowly hunk of rock compared to you, my Sun, that you commit to me and only me." In a strange move, one that only furthered Hot Rod's shock and confusion, he drew his sword. He placed the hilt in Hot Rod's trembling hands and the blade upon his shoulder. It grazed the warlord's neck, so sharp that it brought forth a trickle of magenta.

"I wish for you to take me as your conjunx, or else take my life. For a life without you in it is not worth living, and it would be better to pass under the caring hands of someone who loves me so dearly."

The sword clattered to the floor as Hot Rod abandoned it as if it had injured his own frame to stoop down to kiss his beloved. He stopped a moment before, helm in his hands, just to look into his optics. He savoured every moment of his gaze until his optics shut to make way for another of life's pleasures. Each kiss with Megatron was new and exciting, and each vastly different from the last, and yet familiar. Every touch of their lips felt like coming home from a long trip. It didn't matter how much time had actually passed between each reunion. Days or weeks or even years could have passed and still the kiss would feel the same.

Eternal love. That was what Megatron was requesting of him. To which, of course, there could only be one answer: "I do. I do commit to you. Forever and always will I be by your side. No matter what colours we wear, we will be the constant. Cybertron may wither and die, but my love for you will not. So stand and take what is yours, my love. For we will stand as equals," he helped Megatron to his pedes, but he didn't really lean that much weight on him, "or not at all."

"As you wish, my Prime," Megatron murmured.

For the first time ever, Hot Rod was happy to be called that.

Chapter 11

Megatron ascended to the balcony first, with Hot Rod right behind him. The whole way up his spark raced, while his frame tensed at every sound or perceived movement. Night cloaked them as it had on Megatron's first arrival, but the night could only do so much. With a lithe frame, Hot Rod had no trouble slipping in and out of his room, and after doing it so many times, being caught never crossed his processor.

Megatron, on the other hand, with his wide shoulders and the cannon mounted on his back, made for a bulking shadow in the night; one that would have benefitted from slipping into Hot Rod's room as soon as he could. Gentlemech as he was, he endangered them more by leaning over the railing to help Hot Rod up the last bit of building, though it turned out he really needed the help. Megatron caught Hot Rod's hand as it slipped when he checked the courtyard for movement. Using his brute strength, he pulled Hot Rod over without him having to lift a finger.

Hot Rod couldn't help but blush.

"You should be more careful, little one," Megatron whispered. "I almost lost you there."

"We should go inside." Hot Rod put both hands to Megatron's chest and gave it a little push that wouldn't have moved a bot a third of his size. "Away from prying optics."

"I would have them know of the beauty I am deigned to hold in my arms." He leaned down, and Hot Rod stretched up, but the kiss was withheld. "I will never hide you."

"Please." He gave a harder press, but only once Megatron chose to take a step did they move. He held him as though in a dance, taking twirling steps and bringing Hot Rod back to the night they met. He could practically feel the tickling brush of the regalia as they circled closer and closer. Always just that much more space.

Hot Rod's spark felt as light as it had that night. Glowing with the same love, the same adoration. The newness, the trepidation, had faded, but the core emotion remained. It pulled even more fiercely, *begging* to join in the way that only sparks could. Begging for something that Hot Rod could not give. If they had had such a union, he would have felt the same pull on his lover's. The one spinning him ever closer to the berth, where they would join in the only way Hot Rod could give. Another first and last for him to save and encrypt in his databanks. If only he could guarantee that there they would remain.

All these maybes. Potentials. *Hopefully.*

"I want to remember you..." The words came on an event that was stolen by a warlord's kiss. Though Hot Rod didn't miss that poignant look just before his optics shuttered. One familiar to both of their optics. To their faces. To their very souls. Souls they had to keep hidden when all they wanted to do was let them show.

Megatron's optics shone with nothing but love as he pulled away. "The berth awaits us, my dear."

A few more turns, and they arrived. Megatron sat first, now optic level with Hot Rod. He held both of his conjunx's hands and pulled him closer, but they didn't touch anywhere beyond their palms.

"Will you have me here, my love?" Megatron raised their hands, fingers to the sky, then intertwined them. "Will you make me yours under the jealous light of the moon? Will you grant me the light of your sun?"

"If other forces were not in play, I would give you my sun, whole." Hot Rod took a step closer, optics half-shuttered. He rested his forehead upon Megatron's, ventilating once in and out in time with him. "I will give you everything I can. My light, my heat--"

"Your touch?" Megatron brought one of Hot Rod's hands down to his hips. His optics gleamed with a suggestiveness that said that he didn't intend for Hot Rod's hand to stay where he put it.

"Anything." The word barely escaped Hot Rod's mouth before it was upon Megatron's.

He straddled him, both stealing his heat and creating his own until their cooling fans whirled to life. While the threat of being caught should have taken precedence over all else, all that concerned him began and ended with Megatron. The way his frame flexed and arched at his touch. The way he gasped as his lips met with his neck. The way he gently lay back on the berth, letting his arms fall above his helm, and gave him the most beautiful view he'd ever laid optics on.

Hands shivering with trepidation and mouth open just a little in awe, Hot Rod stroked up Megatron's chassis. "You're so beautiful," his thoughts formed words without his consent.

"Then I would be but a mirror." Megatron's optics closed to allow a shivering ventilation to escape him. They opened just enough to let a sliver of red shine through. "For I see a beauty that could rival any that have had the word describe them."

"You will never let me win, will you?" Hot Rod shook his helm as he, too, lay down and smiled against his plating, ceasing to do so only to bestow another kiss.

Chuckling and pulling Hot Rod further up his frame, he murmured, "I only speak the truth."

As they kissed, slowly and softly, Megatron's hands found places on Hot Rod's frame that would make him blush if he had handled them in public. Perhaps he did now, too, but the red on his face and spoiler had taken up residence there since he had first laid optics on Megatron. There it would remain, if for nothing more than a night. No rushing. Just the gentle caress of lovers with nowhere to be and nothing to do but feel. Touch, and be touched. The brush of fingertips paid the cost of a kiss to quivering helm flares.

What a lovely illusion. To have time. But though the night seemed endless, and though it felt as if time stopped when Megatron kissed him, Luna 2 continued its descent. If they cared, or had even a few moments to waste, they might see how the angle of light changed as it fell upon their tangled frames. Time went on. One of the few constants.

Hot Rod nudged Megatron's hand a little further down his aft. "We haven't the time," he reminded him.

"Primus gifts you a new life," Megatron murmured. He neither advanced his hand's course, nor retreated back. "An uncertain one. I do not dabble in the uncertain. But dabble I must, if I want you. And I do. And if that uncertainty should lead you away from me..." Red optics looked away and then closed, a prick of pain striking through his field and into Hot Rod's, jabbing his spark like a dagger. The fresh wound cooled with the medicine Megatron fed him next: a steady flow of love, followed by the reopening of optics that mirrored the feeling. "... I humbly request whatever hours remain, even if those hours are spent with optics closed. It will still be time I was granted with you."

"I give you everything. My time, my frame, my very spark. Though I cannot give it physically, I hope the metaphorical is enough to satisfy my act of devotion. I give you whatever I am able, my conjunx," Hot Rod finished with a smile.

Megatron's field grew almost stifling with the amount of love he pumped into it. He kissed Hot Rod passionately, smiling into it all the while.

"Conjux," Megatron whispered. "You are my conjux."

"And you are mine," Hot Rod whispered back. He kept his less joyful thoughts to himself. The reminders that whatever bonds he formed as Hot Rod would not transcend to Rodimus' life. What a cruel fate. To have both amica and conjux, but to have both taken from him in a matter of days. Pushing such thoughts to the back of his processor, Hot Rod nuzzled his way into Megatron's neck, hugging his helm. "You are my conjux and I love you."

Hot Rod heard Megatron's ventilations hitch as he hugged him tighter. "I love you, too, my sun."

Putting his mouth by Megatron's audial, Hot Rod whispered, "Make love to me."

"I intend to, my love, but... first, I must ask a rather... *awkward* question." He gave a gentle push to Hot Rod's shoulders, encouraging him to lift off of him. Once he held his gaze, he continued. "I need to know, have you...?" Megatron's face flushed a deeper red as embarrassment trickled into his field.

Hot Rod laughed, letting his forehelm rest atop Megatron's. "No, this is not my first time, but... it has been a while," he admitted. "And I would not have called myself experienced even back then." Hot Rod's embarrassment filled both of their fields.

"Worry not, my dear. This is no place for shame. I ask simply to know how best to approach this. It can be emotionally as well as physically overwhelming if you are not prepared."

"I am ready," Hot Rod said confidently. "With you, I am *more* than ready. I admit I am... nervous, but I am ready."

"Alright," Megatron murmured.

Hot Rod's panel snapped open without warning, and Hot Rod's embarrassment grew tenfold. He hid his face and went to sit up, but that would only press more of the wetness to Megatron, so he held himself in an awkward position, shaking.

"No shame, my love," Megatron reminded him, his fingertips brushing the back of Hot Rod's hands. "Eagerness is good."

Hot Rod peeked out between his fingers. "It is?"

"Of course." Megatron smiled at him. "I am eager, too. To know you as intimately as you wish me to."

Hot Rod flinched when Megatron's spike pressurized and brushed his aft. He twisted at the waist to look and froze.

"Hot Rod?" Megatron's hand went to Hot Rod's hips, his thumbs making circles. "Are you alright?"

Taking a deep ventilation in, and then releasing it in shaking bursts, Hot Rod said, "I am fine."

Megatron gave him a sympathetic look and then shifted them both over on the berth a little. Patting the space next to him, he murmured, "Lie here."

Hot Rod obeyed without question, only now noticing just how much his hands trembled. He brought them up above his helm and fixed Megatron with the most lustful gaze he could manage right then.

Megatron rolled onto his side and kissed Hot Rod's chest. "Fear has no place in the berthroom," he murmured against his plating.

"I am not afraid," he whispered back.

"Nor does lying." Megatron did not reprimand him; his voice was as soft as ever and his optics glowed deep red with nothing but love and understanding. "You are afraid, and that is alright, but as long as you are afraid I cannot make love to you. I need you relaxed." He lifted himself off of Hot Rod and lay his hand over his abdomen. "My love, do you trust me?"

Another shaking ventilation passed through Hot Rod's chest as he lifted his gaze to meet Megatron's. He swallowed, then shuttered his optics and ventilated until his exvents left steadily. Once he opened his optics again, he found Megatron right where he'd left him. Still watching. Still waiting. Waiting for his permission. Respecting his boundaries.

"I trust you," Hot Rod said, without a tremor to be found.

Following a kiss to Hot Rod's cheek, Megatron slid one of his hands up to meet with one of Hot Rod's. His fingers parted to allow Megatron's entrance.

"Squeeze my hand when you need to," Megatron instructed. "For pleasure, for comfort, for whatever you need."

"Okay," Hot Rod whispered.

Megatron smiled as his mouth found Hot Rod's neck, nuzzling and kissing and relishing in the gasps he released. All the while, the hand resting on him slowly travelled down his frame, pausing only once he reached his array.

"I love you," Megatron whispered.

"I would love you a lot more if you would not tease me so," Hot Rod laughed, lifting his hips a little.

"Patience." One of Megatron's fingers found Hot Rod's anterior node, just testing its sensitivity.

Hot Rod keened, gripping Megatron's hand and the sheets as pleasure bloomed in his core.

"Good?" Megatron checked in.

Hot Rod nodded emphatically.

Megatron slid further down, gathering the slickness on his finger, then back up to rub more firmly. "Shh... As much as I would love to hear every beautiful noise you make, we must keep quiet."

Biting his lip, Hot Rod nodded.

"I could help," Megatron offered, kissing at the corner of Hot Rod's mouth. He waited for another nod, then encouraged Hot Rod's lips to part with his own. Out came the moans, now muffled by Megatron's mouth, and gave him the reassurance to slowly push a finger inside of Hot Rod.

His free hand came up to grip at Megatron's helm as their kiss became little more than a noise dampener.

Slowly, carefully, Megatron moved in and out, watching his frame for any signs of discomfort, or worse, pain. Thankfully, nothing but pleased sounds left his voicebox, and his frame moved closer to Megatron rather than away.

Stopping so that he could take his mouth off of Hot Rod's, he asked, "You are not in any pain?"

Hot Rod's glazed optics met Megatron's. "I am as far from pain as can be."

"And how are you managing?" He swirled his finger, testing his calipers on all sides.

Hot Rod bit his lip until Megatron stopped moving, then let out a gasp and said, "I could take more."

Megatron kissed Hot Rod again, working in and out of his valve, then he slowly pushed a second finger in. Now his calipers rippled with little space, but not to the point of discomfort, if Hot Rod's arching frame had anything to say. His mouth and hand grew more fervent in their movements, but he did not tense up or hold his ventilations.

"You are doing fine," Megatron whispered. "And you are so beautiful..." He nuzzled against his cheek. "I cannot take it. I cannot believe someone so precious would allow me to do this. Thank you."

Hot Rod stroked Megatron's cheek and kissed at whatever part of his face he could reach and then at his lips when he gave him access. Then he pulled back so he could just look at him. So he could watch his red optics caress up and down his frame. So he could feed the pleasure he felt through his field into Megatron's. All the while his ventilations were interspersed with the quietest moans, meant only for his beloved as he felt his frame in this intimate way for the first time, and hopefully, not the last. But now was not the time for hope, false or not.

Now was the time for love.

"You are doing just wonderfully," Megatron praised him.

"I want to take your spike," Hot Rod said. "I'm ready."

"My love..." Megatron gently pushed against tight calipers and then kissed Hot Rod when he got a little too loud. He returned to languid strokes before speaking again. "There is no need to rush."

"But there is!" Hot Rod protested. He wrestled his held hand free, and Megatron pulled his fingers out before Hot Rod could hurt himself. He sat up, then pushed against Megatron's shoulder. He held steady. Hot Rod would need to use all of his strength if he even hoped to move him. "The night is not forever. The sun lies in wait to steal it from us, and to steal you from me, and I will not allow you to be taken before I have had the chance to experience you."

"We are not so low on hours that you must push yourself past your limits." Megatron didn't budge. "And that is all that will happen. At best, it will be uncomfortable, at worst, I will damage you. I will condone neither of those outcomes."

"I will go slow," Hot Rod promised. Stroking down his chassis, but stopping short of his heated array, he asked, "Don't you want to feel me?"

"Of course I do, but--"

"Then why do you resist me?" Hot Rod brought his hand up to Megatron's chest, tracing the badge just over his spark. "I want to give you all that I can give you."

Megatron gave Hot Rod a long look. A look full of love, yes, but also uncertainty and fear. Hot Rod made sure to fill his field with his willingness and excitement, so that Megatron may feed off of it and see that he was ready. They were ready.

"I want to make love to you," Hot Rod whispered.

Megatron sighed. "Alright, Hot Rod."

He helped Hot Rod to straddle his hips, already forcing him to spread his legs wideopen. He held his thighs where they sat, though, even when Hot Rod tried to move. He gave him an annoyed look.

"Go slow," Megatron reminded.

"I will be fine," Hot Rod said, trying and failing to keep the annoyance from finding his voicebox. "If I can endure Ultra Magnus' lectures, I can handle this."

Megatron chuckled. Then, with a small sigh, he helped Hot Rod position himself.

Eagerness took over Hot Rod's frame as he tested the rim of his valve on the tip of Megatron's spike while spreading his hands across Megatron's abdomen. He lowered himself onto it slowly, feeling resistance just from the head, but he kept pushing, drawing in a sharp ventilation. He could feel Megatron's optics on him, so he forced it back out as regularly as he could while still pressing down.

Hot Rod got maybe half of his spike in before he couldn't bear the feeling anymore and lifted off. He made sure to sink back down soon so that it would look like that was as far as he had planned on getting in the first place.

"Hot Rod--"

He cut off Megatron's words with a moan too loud for their situation.

Megatron spoke again and didn't stop even when Hot Rod tried to interrupt him again, "Hot Rod, stop. You're hurting yourself."

"I said, I am fine." Hot Rod's ventilations left his frame in short hisses.

"Slow, my love." One hand saw to the task of preventing Hot Rod from further movement, while the other caressed up his spinal strut to release the tension he held there. "I wish to feel you, but not at the expense of your comfort. My pleasure is worth nothing if you are in pain. Go slow. You will adjust. Do you trust me?"

Hot Rod stopped fighting him at that, finding Megatron's face not that far below him. He lifted off his spike to the point where his nodes registered pleasure once more and sighed blissfully. "With anything and everything I can give you."

"Will you, then, give me control?" Black hands settling upon shaking hips. "Will you give yourself over to me? Do you trust that I will bring you pleasure?"

Sliding slow hands up a bulky frame, Hot Rod settled them upon Megatron's shoulders. Gripping gently but firmly, he whispered, "I said anything and everything I can. All that I cannot give is my spark. Control is yours, my love. I leave myself in your more than trustworthy hands."

"Control can be relinquished if your trust in me wanes," Megatron murmured. "Speak up if you feel anything even that even broaches the idea of uncomfortable. I will not see you in pain a moment more."

"I trust you." Hot Rod laid his helm over Megatron's spark. More quietly, perhaps speaking to the night itself, he whispered once more, "I trust you."

The light touch of lips upon the top of his helm prefaced the lift of his hips. If his calipers could sigh, they would have done so with relief when his valve had nothing but the head of Megatron's spike inside of him. It was still very much a presence there, but a much more bearable and pleasurable one.

"There, you see?" Megatron let him down a little more. No further than the next plate, but it was enough to give him that delightful stretch without pushing into the unsavoury. "Is this not more enjoyable than faking what you do not feel?"

Hot Rod lifted his helm. "But your enjoyment--"

"Is certain," Megatron finished for him. "Your presence, your essence, your very *being* is enjoyment enough. Hot Rod..." He cupped his face and threaded his fingers through the flares on his helm. "If you told me that you wished to read for the remainder of this night, I would take delight in watching your optics scan the tome. I want this." His hand returned to his hip, pushing him down just the slightest bit more. Still, no pain came. Not even a mild discomfort. "But above all else, I want to bring you happiness. I hope mine can be found with yours, but if the fates are not to be aligned as such, then I will make my own happiness by sowing a seed of yours."

Hot Rod shivered as Megatron slowly rocked him. Every few strokes, he got him to take just a little bit more. And each and every time, it never hurt. The more his calipers eased open, the easier he found it to let himself fall. Megatron was there to catch him. For however long, he was there. A net hanging by the final threads that could snap at a moment's notice and send him plummeting into a pit that he may never emerge from.

Before long, Hot Rod managed to take more than he had attempted to his first time, only this time it felt good. It felt *amazing*. And to experience all of this with someone he loved so dearly had his spark brimming with more light and warmth than he had ever felt.

He wanted to share the light. The warmth. He wanted to show Megatron everything he was thinking and feeling, and in turn see his thoughts and feelings. In that moment, where he felt full and loved and safe, he found himself just shy of perfection. And yet, that last bit killed him.

"I'm sorry," Hot Rod whispered. "I'm sorry that I can't..." His voice caught in his throat. He avoided Megatron's gaze, his hands curling into fists.

"No more apologies will pass your lips," Megatron whispered back, a hand finding Hot Rod's face. "You are giving me everything, and you feel as though you owe me more?" He shook his helm, and then smiled when Hot Rod looked at him. "This is more than I could ever hope for, Hot Rod. Thank you."

Hot Rod managed a small smile and then a small laugh. A cheerful chime in the darkness. "I love you."

"And I love you, my Prime."

The unfortunate nature of their size difference meant that Hot Rod's lips could only fall upon more of Megatron's frame and not his lips. What a cruel gift his Prime frame would grant him. The ability to kiss him while making love to him, but not the freedom to be able to do so.

Afterwards. Afterwards he would kiss him to his spark's content. Caress and kiss him until his

frame forced him offline. The last memory before his dreams took him would be the scarred plating of a warlord turned lover. It would ease him from the waking to the sleeping world, as it would have to take him when he physically could not keep his optics open.

The last night.

"My Prime..." Megatron's optics grew somber. He hugged Hot Rod at his waist and flipped them so that he could hide his face in the sheets, moaning softly as his spike shifted within his lover.

Hot Rod stared at his shoulder. He couldn't tell if the pain growing in his chest was his own or if it was stolen from Megatron's stifling field.

The words came from deep within him. Why now, he did not know, but they felt right. They felt how Megatron made him feel. *"I stand but a humble mech, baring my soul to our one true life-bringer."* Years of practice allowed them to come easily. Hot Rod smiled at Megatron as he lifted himself onto his hands, head tilted slightly in confusion. "Or, I suppose, here I *lay*," Hot Rod corrected with a laugh. *"Primus, he who split himself into thirteen to defeat Unicron and bring peace to the universe. He who gave the first Cybertronians life. He who watches over every bot from the smallest minicon to the largest Guardian. He who fills our veins with energon."*

"Primus, I am but your servant. Your vessel. Your connection to the corporeal world. I give my all to you. I bond my spark to..." Hot Rod placed a hand on Megatron's cheek. "I bond my spark to Megatron." It caused him physical pain to keep his chest closed right then, especially when Megatron's parted.

"I give you my spark. My soul." Megatron's optics just barely shone through the dazzling green-white light of his spark. "I give it to you and expect nothing in return. I give my all to you, my Prime."

Hot Rod carefully pulled his helm down until their forehelms met. It couldn't be a comfortable position for Megatron, but he didn't fight against his hold. "Though I cannot bond with you physically, I will bond my spirit with yours. No matter what befalls me, I will always belong to you. No god can claim me. Not as long as my spark still beats."

No words could be spoken while Megatron kissed Hot Rod. None needed to be spoken. Not as long as there were lips upon his own and a hand over his chest. Nothing could be more important than simply living in this moment. This beautiful, breathtaking moment.

Everything culminated around their sparks. They yearned to join. Yearned for the one thing that was just out of reach.

Once they parted, Hot Rod gave himself a few moments to ventilate. A moan slipped from his voicebox, too, as Megatron found one of his hands and gripped hard. At least they could be joined this way, if only for this moment. If only for tonight.

His voice still breathy, Hot Rod continued the Oath. *"I leave my life behind me to tread down the path of Primes past. Their wisdom will find me through the Matrix, and I will, in turn, lead my people down the righteous path of Primus. I will rid this world of chaos, as the Thirteen did before me."* He swallowed. Now came the time for his vows. His own personal promises as a Prime. He'd written and rewritten them, never feeling quite right. But now, held under the weight of his beloved, thick in the love emanating from his field and the coupling of their frames, he finally found the words. "I will accept the title of Prime even as I stand--" he chuckled, and Megatron did, as well, "--*lay* here, uncertain as to whether I am truly worthy of the honour. I will accept it in spite of the beauty and love I have found in another. Even when following him, bonding to him, feels like the

right path, I will accept your decision. I will do all that I can to lead my people to a peaceful resolution to this war."

"And I will do just as much," Megatron murmured.

Hot Rod smiled at him, pulling him in close and biting his lip when Megatron began thrusting again, just beyond a languid pace. "I doubt Optimus would be happy to hear that last part added to my vows."

"That is my vow," Megatron explained. "If you must become Prime, then let us not fight. Too often have I seen great love corrupted into bitter hate. I refuse to let what we have fall to the same fate."

Megatron's spark let off green tendrils, reaching for Hot Rod and fizzling out when they touched plating. It took all of Hot Rod's focus to keep his chest from freeing the spark that pushed almost painfully against its casing. His impending overload did not help his concentration.

"Please close your chest," Hot Rod begged, his voice barely audible. "I am not even sure if I am physically capable of bonding with you."

Resting his forehelm on Hot Rod's and exacerbating the pull on his spark, Megatron murmured, "As you wish, my sun."

As soon as the light was doused, Hot Rod became much more aware of his array and the pressure built up there.

"I'm close," he whispered.

Megatron kissed him, and Hot Rod felt his low moan on his lips. "I am, too."

Megatron thrust harder, but they never entered the realm of roughness, and a few moments later Hot Rod experienced the most gentle and yet intense overload of his life. The charge raced up and down his frame, sparking out his fingertips and pedes. He kissed Megatron again and found the crackle of his own overload. The electricity passed back and forth, setting them off again and again until it all bled off and they were left shaking and breathless. Or, perhaps, with just the amount of air they needed.

"I love you, my sun," Megatron whispered into his plating.

Hot Rod shivered as his warm ventilations tickled his still-sensitive frame. "I love you, too."

Chapter 12

The next morning came hazy and warm. A gentle breeze from the balcony tickled Hot Rod's plating and roused him from his slumber. He blinked, fatigue still holding him tight, and found scarred grey plating before his optics.

Megatron.

Hot Rod had to put his hand on his chest to make sure he was really there. His fingers tentatively met the swirls, and then he couldn't help but trace them. One loop. Two loops. Three loops. Four loops. Five loops. That last little swirly bit. Yep. It was all there. In Hot Rod's berth. He couldn't help the little burst of jealousy at the bots who could wake up next to their conjunx every day.

Conjunct... Their first morning as conjunct. Only one left.

His forehead met with Megatron's Decepticon symbol just as he stirred.

"Good morning, my sun," came the groggy greeting followed by fingers gently stroking his spoiler.

"Good morning." Hot Rod smiled, because he *was* happy. To wake up in Megatron's arms and hear his voice, it was a dream come true. Every moment spent with him should have been the best moments of his life, but they didn't have the luxury.

"Such a troubled look for a processor still half in recharge," Megatron murmured. "What plagues you, my love?"

Hot Rod shook his helm. "The same worries that refuse to leave."

Megatron kissed the top of his helm and hugged him tighter.

"I will not ruin our morning," Hot Rod decided. He looked up to find Megatron looking back, and once he smiled, he received a smile in return. "I just want to lay here with you as long as I am able."

"And how long is that?" Megatron asked quietly, a little sadness tingeing his optics.

"Longer than this," was all Hot Rod would say to that.

Hot Rod closed his optics once more, snuggling closer to Megatron. He fell into the blissful half-asleep state that his conjunct's arms brought him. The state that made every touch that much more noticeable. His sensornet would alight every time Megatron's fingers so much as grazed his back, and he would gasp when they found his spoiler.

Until that morning, Hot Rod would never understand why people enjoyed morning frags. The morning was an annoyance at best, and an utter nightmare at worst, but tangled up with Megatron... he got it. A slow frag in sheets still warm from recharge sounded like the best thing ever.

Perhaps this was the rosy lenses others spoke of. Where love changes one's entire outlook. How even the most despised aspects of life could be changed into some wonderful thing, so long as you had your conjunct with you.

Hot Rod propped himself up on an elbow. "Lie on your back."

Megatron cocked his helm, but followed Hot Rod's request with a smile. A smile that grew wider as Hot Rod climbed atop him and left a sleepy kiss on his lips. As sloppy as it was exciting.

"I would be blessed to wake up to this every morning," Megatron murmured.

Hot Rod laughed softly then continued with the kiss he hadn't finished. His hands stroked up and down plating and he didn't stop until Megatron let out a small gasp and a tiny burst of arousal in his field.

"Oh." Megatron's surprise morphed into a different kind of smile. "It seems I have lit a fire in you, my sun."

"Just kiss me," Hot Rod said, before delving back in for another taste of soft morning lips.

Megatron had no complaints as his hands found Hot Rod's waist with a new kind of touch. Somewhere between the sensual strokes of yesterday and the soft caresses of the morning. It did wonders to help make Hot Rod alert, and he could imagine no better way to starting the day than with an overload or two.

Hot Rod inadvertently flinched away from the touch of thick fingers to his aft and the rear of his array, but he quickly corrected himself and push back against the hand. He let out a soft moan as his fingertip found the seam for his panel and stroked it.

"You look beautiful in the sunrise," Megatron whispered.

"You keep trying to talk," Hot Rod said with another smile.

"There is time for both compliments and what you seem to want so badly," Megatron teased. "Or is there somewhere my little Prime needs to be?"

Hot Rod shook his helm. "They gave me this last day for whatever I please. To say my good-byes..."

The mood turned somber and once-fervent hands stopped on waist and chest. Hot Rod placed a soft kiss on Megatron's cheek and then just hugged him. The sun no longer warmed his plating.

"You are asking to get caught."

"Wha--?" A surprised Hot Rod found himself on the floor when he tried to get off of Megatron as quickly as possible. His spark beat a mile a minute as he looked for who had said that, and then he sighed and deflated when he saw Drift at the balcony door. "Primus, Drift, you are going to kill me one day."

"Are you alright?" Drift and Megatron said in unison, sharing an amused look after.

"Yeah, I'm fine." Hot Rod picked himself up, with Megatron helping him with an arm over the side of the berth. His spoiler throbbed from the impact, but upon inspection it wasn't damaged. "Maybe comm me before you come in next time?" Hot Rod suggested to his amica.

"You never cared if I came in unannounced before," Drift pointed out. Then, with a twinge of sadness in his optics, he said, "You forgot, didn't you?"

Guilt twisted in Hot Rod's tank as he frantically searched his processor for any plans he'd made.

Drift sighed but gave Hot Rod a little smile as he walked over to him. "You promised that I would have all of your time today."

"Oh." Hot Rod sent a glance Megatron's way as he got up from the berth. "I did."

"You have made different plans?" Drift assumed.

Hot Rod wrung his hands. "Not... *exactly*."

"But you want to spend the day with him..." Drift cast dimming optics down, but brought them back up shortly after, glowing just slightly dimmer than normal. "I understand."

"No, that's not, well..." Hot Rod sighed. "I do, but I want to spend it with you, too, I just wish... I wish I did not have to choose. I wish I had many days to spend with the both of you."

"Hot Rod, I do not wish to pull you away from your amica." Megatron reached for Hot Rod's hand, threading his fingers in the spaces. "You gave me a wonderful night, and if that is the last I will see of you, then... I will have been privileged to know you at all."

"I am glad to know you actually care about him," Drift cut in, "but Primus, Megatron, that is the sappiest thing I have ever heard anyone say."

Hot Rod giggled while Megatron awkwardly cleared his throat.

Drift cast a glance at Megatron, keeping a respectful distance. "I will relinquish the evening to him. It is for lovers, after all, but an amica endura is gifted the day. And while I worry my hope is a false one, I will continue to hope such a hope. That this love, something that cannot be tainted, will find an end to this war. An example to how love will conquer even the deepest hate, for love knows how to burrow ever deeper. Hate can only broach the edges of sparks, but love originates from within, where hate cannot reach it, and love can expand outwards to rid the frame of its taint. You will lead by example, Hot Rod, with Megatron at your side. Or else you will succumb to the same fate as Optimus, and your love will wither and die."

Hot Rod hugged Drift. "Thank you, Drift. You are the best amica."

"This is not the last day," Drift told Hot Rod, though it sounded as if he were trying to convince himself, too. "We will have much more time together."

Hot Rod hid his face against Drift's shoulder, wishing he could believe that to be true. That the two mechs standing in his room would be just as present in his life after he took the Oath.

"Well, then." Drift held Hot Rod at arm's length. "Let's not waste the day, shall we? We have more days, but it is unadvisable to waste any days gifted to amicas."

"First one to the pede formation buys the other drinks?" Hot Rod quirked up an optic ridge.

"You're on." Drift smiled. "But since *I* do not have anyone to say good-bye to, I know it will be me." With a playful smile, Drift went out the way he came in, vaulting the balcony and climbing down the building without making a sound.

"The pede formation?" Megatron asked, confused, as he went over to Hot Rod.

"Oh, well, you see, it looks like a pede," Hot Rod explained.

Megatron just stared at him for a moment, then chuckled and shook his helm. "Of course. What else could that be?" He took his hand, and leaned down to whisper, "I will see you tonight, then?"

"I will be waiting." Hot Rod kissed him good-bye. "Now, I have to catch up to Drift!"

Surprisingly, Drift made it there first. Hot Rod found him leaning against the formation with a smug smile that only grew as Hot Rod transformed and approached him.

"Took you long enough," Drift gloated. "I think the true tragedy afoot is that Megatron will make you lose every race. A pity. You used to be my only challenge."

"Shut up." Hot Rod nudged him playfully with his shoulder. "Megatron's kisses are worth a thousand drinks."

Drift pretended to retch. "I stand corrected: the true tragedy is that you are now a huge sap."

"Deal with it." Hot Rod stuck his glossa out at him. "You will be in his company much more, now that we are conjunx."

"*What?*" Drift looked at Hot Rod as if he'd just grown a second helm.

"Yeah." Hot Rod smiled. "We performed the acts yesterday."

"Hot Rod..." Drift gave him a pained look. "Are you sure that is... wise? You remember that--"

"I know." Hot Rod crossed his arms and leaned back against the formation. "Quit talking like Ultra Magnus. You keep doing that lately. May I remind you that he said something quite similar when he found out we were amica?"

"But--"

Whatever Drift was going to say next was drowned out by the sudden roar of an engine. It stopped suddenly when someone dropped down behind Hot Rod and said, "Well, isn't that a new look for you?"

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Drift unsheathed his swords before Hot Rod could even catch sight of who had said that. Fear gripped his spark before his optics fell on the Decepticon. A seeker. "Last time I saw you, we shared a certain... *allegiance*." He raised an optic ridge and tapped his chest, nodding down at Hot Rod's.

"*Starscream*," Drift hissed.

Starscream? The fear quintupled, his spark beating so fast that it drowned out all else.

"Well, isn't this my lucky day?" Starscream grinned wide. "Not only do I get to dismantle the mech who took Megatron from me, but also a traitor to our cause!"

"Get out of here, Hot Rod!" Drift shouted.

"Oh, I wouldn't." Starscream crossed his arms, grinning. "The rest of my trine fell behind, but they'll be along soon. Unless they happen to spot someone on the ground." He casually looked around. "Not many places to hide around here, is there?"

"Frag," Drift said under his ventilations. Then, to Hot Rod, he said, "Stay behind me."

"Oh, how cute. You think you can protect him?" Starscream laughed. "Why, Deadlock, do you truly believe you can hold your own against *me*? Megatron's *second-in-command*?" The red of his optics turned hard as his focus shifted from Drift to Hot Rod. "His *conjux*?"

"*What*?" Hot Rod couldn't help exclaiming.

"We all know you never completed the Ritus!" Drift shouted. "You were never official!"

Starscream bristled. "We are more official than he and this *runt* will ever be!"

"Are you *jealous* Starscream?" Drift smirked at him. "Perhaps Megatron decided he'd rather be with someone whose company he actually *enjoyed*."

Starscream's wings hiked up and his field engulfed even Hot Rod in his rage, then snapped back with a smile as he looked up to the sky. A moment later, Hot Rod saw what had made him so happy: the approaching silhouette of another seeker. The new bot dropped down beside Starscream.

"Deadlock." The new seeker donned a small smile. "This should be interesting."

"Hot Rod, meet Thundercracker." Starscream smiled at him. "You see, he's not too happy with Megatron running around with you, either. Isn't that right, my friend?"

"Look at him *cower*." Thundercracker's smile turned to a scowl of disgust. "And *he's* to be the next Prime? Primus must have had few bots to choose from to choose someone so *weak*."

"How does he know?" Hot Rod whispered to Drift. His voice wavered but he couldn't stop it. "You don't think...?"

"Oh, poor thing doesn't think that Megatron would betray him?" Starscream mocked. "Don't worry,

pet, you will soon learn his true nature. He always shows it sooner or later. But I didn't need him to tell me. You two were quite loud the other day. I wouldn't be surprised if the whole of *Cybertron* heard you. I would offer you some advice and say that next time you should check the skies, but there won't *be* a next time for you, so why should I waste my breath?"

Hot Rod's horrified gaze turned to the ground, his vision blurring. "Did Megatron... did Megatron plan this?"

"He planned nothing!" Starscream screeched.

Hot Rod flinched, shaking.

"He's all talk, Hot Rod. Don't let him frighten you. I will protect you." Drift's knuckles creaked under the strain. "I will protect our next Prime!"

Starscream smiled with gritted teeth. "That Autobot symbol suits you, *Hot Rod*. But do you know what would be an improvement?" Slowly, Starscream unsheathed his sword. It glinted in the sunlight, though much more dully than Drift's; a well-used blade. The screech in his voice turned into a low growl as his optics darkened threateningly. "If it was split in two." He let it return to a lighter tone as he asked, "What do you think, Skywarp?"

The next seeker appeared out of thin air behind them, smirking as the shimmering purple haze around him dissipated. Hot Rod backed up against Drift, wishing he could hold his hand and draw some comfort from him, or that he had put more time into learning how to fight.

Three against one, essentially.

Skywarp laughed, grinning with a wild look. "Oh, definitely. I do so love the look of spilled energon over gunmetal grey."

"You'll have to get through me first!" Drift took a step closer to them after casting a quick glance back at his amici.

The three seekers laughed boisterously.

"Oh don't worry, *Deadlock*." Starscream quirked an amused optic ridge up when Drift bristled. "We wouldn't dream about leaving you out of the fun of the slaughter."

"And it will be all the more satisfying to slay the mech who abandoned our cause." Skywarp's words ended on a snarl with bared fangs and claws. He looked like an animal ready to pounce at the first movement.

Knowing now how sharp their hearing was, Hot Rod kept his voice just touch above inaudible. "We should call Optimus. He would know what to do."

"I can protect you." Drift didn't take his optics off of Starscream. "And backup will not get here in time."

"Then we run. Drift, you can't take on three seekers."

"I can protect you!"

"But who is protecting you?" Hot Rod whispered to himself.

Drift took a half step closer to Starscream and Thundercracker, casting a glance back when Skywarp

mirrored the move, his hackles raised. "I am the Prime's protector!" he announced to their displeased audience. "None shall pass me without feeling the bite of my blade!"

"Heh. You actually think you are going to get out of this alive." Starscream lay his sword flat against his other hand, inspecting it. "I suppose it does need a cleaning. Even more so once it's stained with your energon."

"You were never as skilled as I, Starscream. You know that. That is why you brought *back-up*. Because you know you will not be able to take me down on your own." Drift smirked at him, but Hot Rod could see the faint trembling of his frame.

Starscream growled harshly. "Not that I need to prove anything to you, but I will face you alone. Skywarp? Thundercracker?" He looked at them each in turn while flourishing his sword. "You are to be observers only. Do not interfere with my battle. Do feel free to catch Hot Rod for me, though. How 'fair' would our battle be if I had to pay attention to two mechs at once?"

Drift cast a worried glance back to Hot Rod. Just as he did, Starscream ran towards Drift, and he was about to warn him but Drift found his voice first.

"Run!" Drift screamed at him.

Hot Rod's t-cog activated on its own as their blades met with a *clang*. His tires spun on the loose ground. Seeker claws reached for him. He made a sharp turn and just barely dodged them. The growl of frustration from Skywarp found his audials, though. That, and the sound of *him* changing shape.

He couldn't outrun a jet.

"You can run," Skywarp boomed, "but you can't hide!" He laughed maliciously and then added, "And I bet you can't run for lo-ong!"

Hot Rod's engine whined. The strain alone left him exhausted before he'd gotten anywhere, and then a warning popped up on his HUD that turned his veins to ice.

Low energon.

His morning ration! He'd been so preoccupied with making the most of this day with Drift that he'd forgotten to fuel up! Frag, frag, frag!

Hot Rod turned back to the fight. His chances for escape were slim with a full tank and impossible with what he had left. Maybe if he got one of Drift's swords? But then he'd just be more vulnerable.

A sudden burst of anger served to push his tires faster. Why hadn't they trained him? *Armed* him? But he'd snuck out... He wouldn't have been armed anyways.

"It's so cute how you think you can get away," Skywarp taunted him. "Aw, did Megs pick you up because you were so cute? So you could be his little plaything before he went back to the real thing? Aaaawwww, I almost feel *sorry* for you!"

Hot Rod slid sideways when Skywarp was suddenly before him. How was he doing that? It didn't matter. He transformed out of shock and rolled, stopping only once he hit Skywarp's leg--*hard*. Before he could shake the fog from his processor, Skywarp grabbed him by both his wrists and proudly held him out before him.

"Got him!" he announced.

"You praise yourself like that was a difficult task," Thundercracker said, calmly watching Drift and Starscream battle.

"I don't see you doing anything!" Skywarp countered, throwing Hot Rod over his shoulder. "Besides," he continued when Hot Rod beat his fists and pedes against him, "the fragger squirms."

Hot Rod couldn't see the fight, only hear it. The grunts overlaid with the meeting of swords. The occasional cry of pain. Only then could he tell who took the hit, and every time he recognized Drift's pain his spark constricted and his hope dwindled.

Some leader he would make. He couldn't even save his amica from his fate.

"*You.*"

Hot Rod yelped when someone tugged his spoiler back until it bent.

Thundercracker circled around Skywarp until he faced Hot Rod. "You will remain still."

"Make me!" Hot Rod tried to throw a punch his way but feel short. In lieu of that, he spat in his face.

Thundercracker's fingers found his throat and squeezed. Hot Rod clawed at his wrist as his vision went blurry. His already low energon levels helped the process along and his vision grew dark when he was suddenly released. Or rather, when Skywarp turned and Thundercracker had to let go.

"Starscream gets to kill the brat!" Skywarp growled a reminder.

"Drift," Hot Rod said, his voice grated against his burning throat, laced with static.

Energon leaked magenta trails over the white of his plating. His only comfort was the deep and all but *gushing* wound on Starscream's abdomen. Each blow came more slowly and weakly than the last. Their optics flickered and all of their biolights had gone dark to conserve energy.

A glint of blue among the chaos did a double take that cost him a hefty toll. His panicked cry of his amica's name was cut short with a debilitating thrust of Starscream's sword through his chest. Even from this distance, Hot Rod could see the energon he coughed up as the blade left his frame.

"Drift!" Hot Rod's shout carried little volume with it, but what did carry met audials with more static than anything.

Drift dropped one sword in favour of covering his new wound, as if that could staunch the gushing flow. He fought as bravely as before, though all his energy had to be turned to defense as Starscream struck again and again. His relentless barrage lead to a blow that threw Drift down on his back and left him at the mercy of someone who would give none.

Hot Rod watched with horror as Starscream laughed triumphantly and maniacally. He saw Drift's limbs shake as he tried to push himself up from the ground, and then as they stilled while his chest rose and fell rapidly. The blue of his optics flickered while the red of Starscream's burned ever brighter.

"If killing the one who took Megatron from me feels as half as good as it feels to see you fall, then I will never need another drop of energon to pass my lips." Starscream smiled wildly. "I could fuel myself on this feeling alone!"

Drift turned his helm towards his amica, ignoring Starscream gloating above him. "Hot Rod," his

rasping words just met Hot Rod's audials. "I'm--" He coughed up another splatter of energon. "I--"

"No!" Hot Rod shrieked as Starscream's sword came down--right through Drift's spark chamber.

Drift's frame convulsed, a light rivalling that of the sun beating down on them flickered around the piercing blade and then was gone as his helm smacked down on the ground and stilled.

"That's enough talk from you," Starscream said. He slowly retrieved his sword, dripping with energon, and Drift's frame followed the pull, but only for a moment. He fell back to the ground, and Hot Rod watched with disbelief when no movement followed. He didn't reach for his sword, though it lay right by his hand. He didn't turn his helm to look at Hot Rod once more. He didn't even *twitch*.

"Let me go!" Hot Rod thrashed in Skywarp's hold even more so than before. He kicked and punched and screamed and did whatever he could to get away from him. He screamed every profanity he'd ever heard and then screamed some more until his *own* audials rang.

"Let him go," Starscream ordered, far more calm than he should be.

Hot Rod finally followed Drift's original order. He ran. As soon as his pedes and hands--whatever could propel him forward--found purchase, he ran. Right to Drift. Right to where he lay. Where a magenta flower bloomed far too quickly. Where the ground turned slick and sticky.

"Drift?" Hot Rod's voice came at barely more than a whisper. That was why Drift didn't answer him. That had to be it. He couldn't be... Nothing and no one was stronger than his amica.

Far too close for comfort, Starscream laughed. Low and dark to begin, then a crescendo that pulled similar laughs from his trine. The sickening sound filled Hot Rod's audial with a roar that corrupted and became a harsh static that seemed to manifest in the physical world. Flickers bothered at the edges of his field of vision, forcing him to focus on the frame lying before him. The frame that was far too still.

Hot Rod fell to his knees, his hands hovering over Drift. They shook violently. Enough to rouse Drift if he lay them on him. If he could still be roused. The air between them allowed him ignorance. Ignorance that Starscream would not let him have for long.

"Drift..." With hands that had never been more careful, Hot Rod dared touch his amica. When he didn't react, Hot Rod shook him. "Drift, cease this teasing. I... I've had enough. Please... get up."

Drift's helm lolled when Hot Rod hugged his frame to his chassis. His arms stayed slack at his side. All tension had fled his frame.

Every single warm memory of dozing together in the slanted rays of sunlight through his room's window had grown cold. Because he'd felt how his frame felt while he slept. He knew how his arms or helm would lay.

It was nothing like this.

"We should just get the job done," Thundercracker broke Hot Rod from his painful reverie. "Before Megatron wonders where we are."

"No, no, these things can't be rushed," Starscream said dismissively. "And where is the fun in all of this if we don't let him *suffer* a little? Is that not exactly what he did to me?"

Their words reached Hot Rod, but they were muffled and garbled as if he was trapped in an invisible

bubble. But there was no bubble. There was nothing keeping them from him. A few steps and the swing of a sword, and his reign would end before it could even start. He had to move. He had to leave. He had to do *something* beyond quivering over Drift's lifeless frame.

He couldn't force his frame to move. How long would they leave him to suffer?

A noise much louder than the seekers' voices took over his frame. He felt it in his throat, though it felt foreign, as if it came from around him rather than from within. Just beyond that, he could hear Starscream laughing.

The low cry grew to a harsh wail of loss, becoming so shrill that Hot Rod saw all of the seekers wince and cover their audials. Just as Starscream started to lunge towards Hot Rod to put an end to his noise, Hot Rod burst into flames.

Chapter End Notes

I realize that you all probably hate me now (I understand)

Also I'm going to start posting every other week now. So there won't be a new chapter next week.

Chapter 14

The fire licked at Hot Rod and Drift alike, and though he felt the intense heat, it refused to burn them. Starscream stopped short, fear and confusion worming its way into his smug field.

Flames tore through Hot Rod's veins until he felt like a sentient fireball. A fireball that fed on his grief and anger and turned it right back on Starscream. He ran at him faster than he'd ever moved on his own two pedes, somehow tackling him to the ground even though he must have been twice his weight.

Burn it all! Burn Starscream and his lackeys! Hot Rod lost himself to the flames and only saw the vague shapes of the seekers as he roared and tore through them like they were nothing.

Because they were. They were nothing. And if they were anything, then let them be kindling. Let them burn quickly and be lost to the flames. Nothing but quick fuel and a means to an end. Gone before they could be missed.

No matter how hot he burned, though, Hot Rod felt cold to the very core. The chill of death had found a home within his being, and he felt its hands reaching for him as well.

"Drift will not find the Well alone!" Hot Rod screamed over the confused and panicked screeches of the seekers. They tried to run. Tried to fly away. But Hot Rod was faster. He took them down before the idea of escape had fully formed in their processor. "Either you, or I, or *both* must go with him, but not before I have left burns on your very souls!"

As suddenly as the flames had come, they burnt out, and left him cold and nearly depleted of energon. He fell somewhere near Drift's frame, but far enough that his weakened frame could not reach him.

He heard Starscream laugh again, albeit a bit shakily, and soon after the rest of his trine joined in.

"My amica," Hot Rod whispered, too quietly for the seekers to hear him even if they silenced themselves. He dragged himself to Drift until he could just touch their fingertips together. "It seems that I will lead you. I will return to the Allspark with you. You will not be alone, Drift. Wait just a few moments more for me."

"Well, now that *that's* over," Starscream said, "why don't we get back to killing you slowly, hm? Does that sound good to you, Hot Rod?"

If Hot Rod cared to deign him with an answer, and if he'd had the strength to, he would have agreed. Quickly, slowly; it was all the same. So long as it ended and he could be with his amica again. Take him. End him. Anything but this apathetic emptiness.

Drift's half-dried energon met with Hot Rod's as Starscream cut a shallow line down his back. And Hot Rod whined in pain even if the cut could not compare to the pain in his spark. It stung more than it bled. A burning trail down his back. The last embers before the sword met somewhere permanent. Something that Hot Rod wouldn't experience, however, for he blacked out before Starscream could do something more fatal.

I will see you soon, my dear amica.

Hot Rod felt hands on his frame, and a warmth flowing into him. Was this death? He thought it would feel cold. If it was death, then he would welcome it. He curled closer to the feeling and drank in the new heat, even sighing.

Even more peculiar, he heard a growl. It came from the warmth. Shortly following, he heard words.

"You will regret taking even one step more."

Was he walking? Everything was black, beyond the warmth. The warmth was the colour of a rosy sunset and made him feel as content as watching one with Drift. Perhaps the voice was his, guiding him along the same path. It sounded far deeper, though.

"If you do not give me pause to save him, then I will show you a fate worse than death." The voice fell back upon its growling tone.

Of course. The hands holding his frame protectively became clear then, and he forced his optics open to the familiar sight of battle-scarred grey.

"Megatron..." His voice was meek.

"Thank Primus," Megatron whispered, holding Hot Rod even closer. "I feared the worst." He felt him bristle before he said in the same growling tone, "Don't think I don't see you, Skywarp. You three are lucky that he survived, but I am not finished yet, *and you will let me finish.*"

"What?" With dazed optics, Hot Rod tried to look around, but all he could see was blue sky and grey plating.

"Take all the energon that you require, my love," Megatron murmured. "I have plenty for the both of us."

"Energon? I was out..." Hot Rod blearily checked his HUD and saw his tanks at the halfway mark and rising. "You?" No matter how heavy his hand felt, he brought it to his abdomen and found Megatron's there, guarding his intake valve.

Megatron hugged him even closer. "I am sorry I did not get here sooner."

Hot Rod's spark constricted. "Drift."

"I will avenge him. Consider Starscream already one with the Allspark." Megatron growled again to their audience, then to Hot Rod said, "I am sorry, my dear, but this is all I can give you for now."

The half-used energon flooding his systems left him feeling high and disoriented. Every brush of fingers on his frame buzzed with energy, and before he knew it most of the warmth left him lying on the ground, though much more carefully placed than when he had collapsed.

"I see you are all incapable of following orders," Megatron said, turning his helm to look at each of his subordinates.

"I take my orders from Megatron, Leader of the Decepticons!" Skywarp yelled. "Not Megatron, Wooer of Autobots!"

Megatron's cool gaze found Skywarp, who immediately cowered under its intensity.

"My seekers are loyal to *my* cause first and foremost," Starscream said. "Until now, many of our pursuits aligned, but I am afraid that this is not a road that we or *any* self-respecting Decepticon may

traverse! You have tainted our name, and I am disgusted that you still deem yourself worthy to wear our badge!"

"Are you are afraid, Starscream?" Megatron grinned at him darkly. "What a surprise."

Hot Rod lifted himself onto his hands and knees and crawled to Drift's frame while they were preoccupied with each other. He would protect his amica in death as he had always protected Hot Rod in life. It was the least he could do to honour his bravery. His servitude. He showed more loyalty than most would to an already realized Prime.

Of all the souls out in this wasteland, his should have been the last to be taken.

"My amica..." Hot Rod touched his forehelm to Drift's, and already he could feel how his temperature had dropped.

Megatron glanced back, then turned fully, his optics full of panic until he found Hot Rod, and then his field expanded with sorrow.

"You have grown soft, Megatron." Starscream sneered with disgust. "You should *rejoice* at Deadlock's passing! A Decepticon traitor has been slain on this day, and he will not be the only one."

Ignoring his obvious threat, Megatron growled, "His name was *Drift*, and he was a far better warrior and mech than you will *ever* be! No one as *vile* as you could ever hope to have an amica like Hot Rod!"

"Oho he was your little playthings *amica*?" Starscream chuckled darkly. "How grossly sentimental. We are at war! This is no time for such titles. Not when lives are so *easily* taken." He gave Hot Rod a meaningful look that was ignored.

"Or perhaps no one wishes to be joined to you in any way at *any* time!" Megatron countered.

Starscream's wings shot up angrily and he turned that anger on the grieving Hot Rod, almost completely unaware of the scene before him.

A growl bubbled up from deep within Megatron's tank. It rumbled from him like distant thunder, ending on the snarl of a much closer lightning strike. One that would have any mech's frame crackling with charge.

"Don't you dare touch him." The growl stayed in Megatron's threatening voice.

"Why him?" Starscream demanded. "Of all your potential suitors—*Decepticon* suitors—did you choose this runt of an Autobot? You could have anyone you want! You could have—*could have*—had me. I will not be touched by hands tainted by Autobots!" The rage in his optics burned even Hot Rod, and it was Megatron who was in the direct line of fire. "You should have torn him in two the second you laid optics on him! You should get rid of any Autobot you see! Especially one able to infiltrate our ranks. You should have let me finish him off! And yet, here he remains. In *your* care."

"If a suitor worthy of my love could have been found within the Decepticons, I would have already given myself to them," Megatron said.

Starscream's plating bristled and flared out until he seemed to be twice his size. "I'm just trying to rid you of your leech problem! I'm trying to help you!"

"I do not need your help. I have *never* needed your help!" Megatron growled with barely a glance thrown Skywarp's way when he took a step towards them. He threw over his shoulder, "If either of you interfere I will ensure that neither of you make it back to base alive."

"Stand down, Skywarp," Starscream said with a sudden calmness, raising his hand toward his trinemate. "You as well, Thundercracker." He gave them both a glance. "No need to worry." His voice got almost as low as Megatron's when he spoke next. "I have been waiting for this day for a *long* time."

"None of you touch Hot Rod." Megatron only glared at Starscream, but Skywarp and Thundercracker shared a wary glance and took a few steps back. "If he gets even one more scratch I will not only kill you, I will make sure that it is a long and painful death, and that no one will be able to recognize your corpses when I am done with you."

Starscream's rage returned full force, like a summer storm. "It's *sick* how much you care for this Autobot! Are you really willing to throw away everything that you've worked for? Everything that *I've* worked for? All for *him*? *WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT HIM?*"

Starscream fired his thrusters and lunged at Megatron, who he just barely missed. He changed direction quickly, but before he could get any closer to Hot Rod, Megatron tackled Starscream to the ground.

A hand crushing his neck, Megatron growled, "I said: none of you touch him."

Starscream managed to position one of his heel thrusters towards Megatron and fired it. Megatron bellowed in pain and then was pushed back by Starscream, who scrambled to his pedes while Megatron inspected the new mark on his leg.

"And I said: what's so special about him?"

"That's a question you should be asking about yourself!" Megatron spat. "When you joined the Decepticons, I saw greatness in you. I saw someone fit to take my place when the time came. But I see now that you are nothing but a jealous, spiteful mech who seems to have gotten it into his processor that I actually *care* about you."

Grey wings rose until they were high and tight.

"Whatever you thought we had, was a thing of convenience. You gave yourself to me, and I took it. There were a multitude of Decepticons I would have chosen over you, but why go out of my way?" Megatron pulled his sword from its sheath, pointing it at Starscream. "You came to me so easily."

Far more hastily, Starscream drew his, as well, and charged at Megatron without a second thought.

Megatron deflected his first blow with a mighty swing, sending Starscream rocking back while his own pedes held steady. He smiled darkly when Starscream snarled and attacked again, still not landing a single blow, and getting thrown back again and again.

"You cannot beat me, Starscream. Every challenge you have ever posed has ended with your humiliation. Today, however, will not end the same. Humiliation is not enough anymore. Today will be the day you perish, and I will forever savour the taste of this victory. I will mark this day in my records so that I may celebrate its anniversary for as many more years as Primus grants me. It will be long past your time, that it for certain. And each day more will leave a sweeter taste in my mouth. I can already feel the bitterness you've left on my glossa fading. You are not long for this

world."

A screech that blew the audials of everyone within range ripped from Starscream's voice box as he flew at Megatron again. His thrusters ensured that his pedes never touched the ground as he hacked and slashed to no avail. If Hot Rod had the capacity to be impressed right then, he would have been proud to watch Megatron's fighting prowess.

But Drift took all thoughts. Drift, and grief.

Starscream attacked with blazing speed and an agile sword to match; too fast for Hot Rod to keep track of even if his processor could keep up with the fight. Even so, Megatron always seemed to know where he would strike next, but every now and then Starscream got a blow to connect.

Megatron spent so much time on defense, he seldom had an opportunity to strike. Seldom did an opening appear, but each one left Starscream dripping magenta.

"As sloppy as ever, Starscream," Megatron growled after deflecting him back.

Starscream landed ungracefully on his pedes, huffing and bleeding from twice as many wounds as Megatron, and his much deeper, though a nasty cut on Megatron's thigh had him favouring his right side.

They just stared each other down for a while, not saying anything.

"What are you waiting for?" Megatron spat. "Are you waiting to bleed out? To die as you lived: cowardly?"

Starscream shrieked and ran at him, not using his thrusters this time. It slowed him down and made him for a much easier target. Slow enough for Megatron to thrust his sword into his abdomen, with Starscream letting out a sputtering cry. He managed to dodge the next swing of his sword, but he stumbled and fell back to the ground.

"Starscream!" Skywarp screeched.

"Would you like to be next?" Megatron asked without looking at him, stalking towards Starscream.

Skywarp said nothing more, and made no move forward. He and Thundercracker watched with horror as Megatron pinned Starscream to the ground with his pede.

"I would say that this a lesson to not meddle in my affairs, but I am done teaching such an insolent student." Megatron pressed down with his pede, and Starscream's optics bugged out as he scrabbled at his calf. "You may have learned nothing, but you have taught me to cut off the head of treachery as soon as it rears itself. Today, I will take it down; frame and soul. And let this be a warning!" His deep red optics looked wild as he turned to face the seekers. "This is what will happen if anyone so much as *thinks* of harming Hot Rod, or anyone he holds dear!"

"Okay, we've learned our lesson!" Skywarp's face pleaded as much as his voice did. "We'll leave the Autobot alone."

"No." Megatron shook his helm. "You have learned *nothing*." He fixed a loathsome look on Starscream's frightened face.

Starscream's optics flared. "Wait, Megatron--!"

"Shut up." Megatron stabbed his sword into Starscream's neck, twisting it and cutting off whatever

noise he had been trying to make.

He still managed to gurgle as his energon spurted from his wound and his clawing grew more and more feeble. Sparks crackled from his flaring optics and static-spewing voicebox, or what was left of it.

His mouth moved, and Megatron almost wished he hadn't destroyed his ability to speak, if only to hear his begging for mercy. He yanked his sword free to another rush of energon and another splutter trying to pass itself off as words.

Skywarp and Thundercracker fled before the light was able to fade from Starscream's optics.

Megatron glared up at their forms as he sheathed his sword, still slick with energon. "So much for loyalty," he mused as he knelt down to pick up Starscream's corpse. He carried it with one arm and no regard as to how it hung or scraped against the ground. He deserved worse.

He dumped it before Hot Rod, and the seeker fell with limp limbs that stuck out at awkward angles. His mouth and optics hung wide with his final expression of fear and desperation.

"He is slain," Megatron stated.

Hot Rod barely glanced up at Starscream before letting his forehelm rest against Drift's again.

"Drift has been avenged." Megatron knelt before Hot Rod. "I am only sorry that I could not end Starscream's life before he had the opportunity to take Drift's."

"Is this what it means to be a Decepticon?" Hot Rod whispered, lifting his helm just a little. Once more he looked into Drift's black optics, and once more he hoped to see a spark of blue. A ventilation lifting his chest. A twitch. *Anything* but this stillness. The stillness that could only mean death. A thing Drift could never be. He couldn't be. He... Hot Rod hugged him closer. Every moment where he didn't hug him back was worse than the last. "To just kill and kill until nothing stands in your way?"

Megatron was silent for some time. "I am afraid that is what it has grown to mean," he finally said, remorse thick in the low rasp of his voice.

"Would you have killed me?"

"What?"

Hot Rod flinched away from the hand that fell upon his shoulder. Intentional or not, he was glad to have reacted that way. Until the pain of his rejection flooded Megatron's field and his own field adopted it, compounding on the loss. The constriction of his spark. The realization that he wanted to forget Drift when he accepted the Matrix to make this all end. And how terrible he felt about wanting to forget him. His amica. The only mech that kept Rodimus Prime at bay. The one who kept Hot Rod alive.

He'd died with him, after all.

"If I... if we had not met. If I became Prime. *When* I become Prime. I will be in your way. I will be the next obstacle to your cause, if you can call it that anymore. I am more confused as to what you stand for than I was before. So I am *asking* you if you would have killed me!" A sudden rage roared from his voicebox, making his throat burn. "Tomorrow we will be sworn enemies! None of this matters..." And as quickly as it came, it faded to the unrelenting nothingness that enveloped him in the worst kind of embrace. He sought comfort in his embrace with Drift. A comfort that never

came. "We will all succumb to our fate."

"You are my fate." Megatron didn't attempt contact with him again, though Hot Rod would have allowed it--welcomed it, even--if he had. He wanted him to. He needed it. "*You* are my cause, now. My one and everything and I will not fight you. I refuse to put you or your kind in harm's way. No longer."

"My *kind*?" A gentler rage, if it could ever be such a thing, took hold of his frame. "My kind is *dead*. He lays before you now, colder than anything I have ever touched."

A few sudden movements later, and both his and Drift's Autobot symbols lay overlapped where Hot Rod had thrown them. Together, even now, in a cause neither truly believed in. A cause Hot Rod could not understand, from either side. Still in his peripheries, a blot of violet among the grey.

The chest that bore the symbol of his enemies rose and fell with a sigh, and with a much slower movement than Hot Rod's, a black hand rose to strip the colour from it. Megatron held it a moment longer, and then he, too, tossed it away.

Megatron opened his arms. "Will you accept the comfort of one who is bound to no fate?"

Hot Rod cast him a glance, but instead hugged Drift closer. "You were awful to him."

Megatron's confusion compounded on itself.

"To Starscream," Hot Rod clarified.

"He was going to kill you!"

"So would any Decepticon!" Hot Rod shouted. "But you two clearly--!" He grit his denta, his lip quivering. Forcing his voice to a more reasonable level, he continued, "You have a history. It was not all lies. To see you treat him this way... What will come of us if this love is not meant to be? Will we succumb to the same bitterness? The same horrific end? Is this what my future holds?"

Megatron said nothing for a long while. Long enough for Hot Rod to fall back into the void where his feelings resided. Where anger and sorrow fell to nothing and then roared to a blaze in a split second.

The fallen second-in-command made an awful scraping noise as Megatron dragged him away from a grieving Hot Rod. Awful, but preferable to the silence. Megatron's pedesteps had more and more time between them as he slowed to a stop before him, kneeling down until Hot Rod could look at him if he cared to.

"I will not lie to you, my dear, I meant many of the words I spoke, but you must trust me when I say that what we have is a love of an entirely different breed. I would shudder to even consider what Starscream and I had--and our best times are *far* behind us--to be love. And while I do not expect you to believe me, I know how Starscream fights. When his processor is in the fight wholly, he is ruthless, but when he is fueled by anger, he gets sloppy. I wanted to ensure a swift victory so that he and his seekers did not have the opportunity to harm you." He waited until he held Hot Rod's gaze to continue. He bore everything in his spark to him there. All the love. The confliction. The overwhelming desperation and hope. Everything warring inside of him. "If this is our last chapter, then I will leave quietly. I will be but a shadow on your long, and I hope, happy, life. I will leave you be, but you cannot ask me to stop loving you. I will love you until I cease to be, and no sooner. But I must ask you, if only to selfishly bring myself peace, if you will allow me to try and bring the same peace to you. Please, my sun, allow me to comfort you in your time of need."

All of Hot Rod's grief rose to the surface and littered his frame with sparks that jumped to Drift and died on his frame. He hugged him as tightly as he could, but received no comfort from him. When it grew to be too much, he abandoned him for arms that could truly hold him.

Megatron curled forward as he embraced Hot Rod. He shielded him with his frame as best he could, but he could only do so much for the pain blooming deep within his chest.

"I am so sorry, Hot Rod," Megatron whispered. "Drift did not deserve this."

"It should have been me," Hot Rod whispered back.

"It should not have been either of you," Megatron corrected gently.

"All those things you said..." Hot Rod burrowed his face into his chest, despite the confliction licking at his spark chamber. "The Decepticons are not what you say. They've evolved. I fear you and the Autobots have both forgotten why it is you fight. You fight because it is all you know."

Megatron hugged him tighter. "Darkness tempts my spark. It tugs as hard, often harder, than my quest for justice. It is the voice that keeps me killing and killing with no remorse. It is what has kept the war going as long as it has. It is why I can no longer see peace as an option. But Hot Rod..." He sighed. Then in an unexpected move, he released him. He held him at arm's length, no matter how he struggled. "This is not the time for this conversation. You are grieving. But I unfortunately cannot put it off any further. What I need to say must be said *now*."

"Hot Rod, I love you. I say this not to hear the same from you, but to tell you that is simply how I feel about you. I am unsure as to *why*. You are beautiful, smart, and skilled, yes. You are chosen by *Primus*. Of course I would love you. Who wouldn't? But something drew me to you before I even knew any of these things about you. I only knew that you were an Autobot because I had been watching you from the moment you set pede in the mansion. I still do not know what force draws you to me, but I need you to know... No force on this planet has ever even made me *consider* bringing an end to this war. I had accepted that it would end once I fell. Or Optimus. But now..."

"I cannot fight you, Hot Rod. I *won't*. If you become Prime and must continue the war... I will bow to you. The Autobots will be victorious. You will be regarded as a hero to our race, and I will die."

"No!" Hot Rod struggled, but Megatron's grip was far too strong. "I won't let it. I won't give the order!"

"If you become Prime, you will have to."

Hot Rod stopped struggling, the crushing weight of everything that was happening and that would happen found his shoulders once more. Thankfully, Megatron let him fall back into his arms. He held him even as sparks jumped painfully between their frames. Tighter, even.

"Our predicament is difficult. There is no clear-cut answer to any of our problems. I wish I could just end the war, but... Not all of my troops will listen. Some will lash out and launch unpredictable and reckless attacks against the Autobots, and against me, as well. I do not fear them, but peace cannot come as easily as a few words spoken. Nor will a multitude of them. There is not..."

Megatron sighed, and through that sigh Hot Rod felt some of Megatron's weight fall upon him, too. While he couldn't handle his own, somehow he was able to support Megatron. "I am so sorry, Hot Rod. There is no easy answer to this. I am not sure I can stop the flow of fate. We will both succumb to it."

"It's not fair," Hot Rod whispered.

"No. It's not."

A harsh gust of wind found them and peppered them with mini bullets that scraped away at the paint of both the living and the dead. Hot Rod was spared much of it, thanks to Megatron, but he still felt the sting in places.

Once it subsided, Hot Rod pressed against Megatron's chest so that he would release him, and then he picked up their discarded badges.

"As much as I would like to leave these, this is not where our fate can leave us," Hot Rod said morosely. "We are too entwined with our factions."

"I have no use for it now," Megatron refused, lifting a hand to stop Hot Rod. "If I must dedicate myself to a cause, let it be you. At least that is a cause I still believe in. A cause that still has a chance to do some good."

Hot Rod shook his helm. "It is too late, Megatron. Drift is gone, and Hot Rod may as well have gone with him."

"Don't say that." Megatron's shoulders fell from the pressure of his field, and it would have bowed Hot Rod, too, if Drift's passing had not already let the weight of the world find familiar shoulders. "Please, Hot Rod," he begged once more, lightly holding his wrist.

Hot Rod persisted, and Megatron sighed regretfully while he let his lover reattach his enemy's symbol to one who was as far from the meaning as could be. His own was returned to his chest as well, but Drift's was left where it lay.

"You are free, Drift." Hot Rod rested his hand over Drift's too-still one. Despite it all, he smiled. A sad smile. "*You're free.*"

Chapter 15

The calm that found Hot Rod's spark was short-lived.

"I've gotta..." Hot Rod moved jerkily from the sudden realization, ripping up a bit of the terrain, "... gotta get stuff."

"What are you doing?" Megatron's hands hovered over his shoulders, but he didn't make an attempt to stop his movements. When Hot Rod didn't stop or answer him, he said, "Hot Rod. Stop. You might hurt yourself."

Hot Rod paused, hands shaking, not nearly enough pieces making a small pile beside him. "I have to make a coffin," he said through the static. "I have to lay Drift to rest."

"I will have one made for him," Megatron offered. "Please, my dear, you are grieving."

"You don't understand!" Hot Rod screeched suddenly. "He's a Spectralist it has to be stuff from here. It has to..." He pulled hard at a piece of metal peeling up from the ground but his hand slipped. A trickle of magenta dripped from his palm, but he kept pulling even as his hand grew slick with his energon.

Megatron's hand engulfed Hot Rod's and halted his attempts. "Please. Let me help. Hurting yourself does nobody any good, and I know that Drift would not want to put you in any pain."

"Doesn't matter," Hot Rod's voice was barely audible. "Spark hurts more."

"For me, then?" With some gentle prying, Megatron was able to take Hot Rod's hand fully in his. "We can do this together."

Hot Rod watched him, confused, as he released his hand and stood, drawing his sword.

"Move out of the way," Megatron instructed.

He did just that, still confused as he watched Megatron jam the tip of his blade under the piece and pry it up. When it didn't break off, he stabbed his sword down over and over until he could rip it up with his hands.

"Megatron, you don't have to..."

His conjunx ignored him and kept stabbing and prying up bits from the ground, his face an expressionless mask.

His spark feeling a touch warmed--only a touch--Hot Rod got back to prying pieces up himself. Even as the energon kept trickling down his fingers, as the cut burned like nothing else, and as exhaustion *begged* him to cease, he would not. Not even when he saw how much faster Megatron accomplished the same task. Drift deserved everything Hot Rod could give. Until his hands either seized up or fell off, he would keep going.

"Should I take some material from the formation?" Megatron asked gently, his optics watching Hot Rod with sympathy.

Hot Rod's hands shook until all the strength left them. He nodded when the words wouldn't come, but still he would not stop trying.

Megatron touched his shoulder in passing and then got to work in carving out some of their race marker.

Every other time, only their tires and struts would hurt, and maybe a few scrapes from errant stones. Now Hot Rod could not sit beneath its shadow without his spark hurting like nothing he'd ever felt. He knew he'd have to come back, though. To visit his final resting place. Maybe one day he could recall their memories happily, but today all they brought was more pain.

With Megatron's help, it didn't take them long to amass enough material for a coffin. Not that Hot Rod knew how much they would need. He hadn't even looked up from his work, and it was only once Megatron gave his shoulder a squeeze that he looked up.

"This should be enough," he said quietly.

Hot Rod said nothing in response. He just reached for Megatron with need and fell against his chest when he knelt down to embrace him.

"Your sword..." Hot Rod gave it a sad glance. It lay dull and bent on the ground.

"I do not need it anymore," Megatron said. "Besides, it made for a much better tool here."

Hot Rod burrowed further into the safety of Megatron's arms. "Thank you."

Megatron said nothing but curled himself more protectively around his conjunx. He held him like that until Hot Rod backed off just a tad. He brought his forehelm down to touch Hot Rod's. "Should I put it together?" Megatron asked.

Hot Rod nodded.

"Alright."

While Megatron stood to get to work, Hot Rod crawled back over to Drift. He lifted his helm into his lap and held his hand over his chest wound. If he really tried, he could pretend it wasn't there. That he couldn't see the edge of his spark casing. That he couldn't see the lack of light. The emptiness.

Hot Rod looked up at Megatron instead.

With Hot Rod's direction, though it was little more than "that piece there," Megatron set to work on welding Drift's coffin together. Until he finished the base, Hot Rod held Drift's limp hand. Hoping--*praying*--that he was simply sleeping. All he needed was a little rest and some energon once he woke up.

Hope got him nowhere.

Soon enough the base grew the beginnings of walls and Megatron said as gently as he was able, "We need to move his frame now."

Hot Rod nodded, though his grip on his amica's hand grew fiercer. Only once Megatron walked over and knelt down, looking Hot Rod right in the optics, did he let go. He "helped" Megatron move Drift with a hand on his calf, and then he was laying in the half-finished coffin, and Hot Rod's knees gave way.

Megatron caught him just before his aft hit the ground and then carefully set him down. He stooped down to squeeze Hot Rod's shoulder and kiss the top of his helm, then continued building the coffin.

The pile got smaller and smaller in Hot Rod's peripheries, but Megatron made sure that he left a window for him to see Drift until there was nothing more to weld, and the final piece was welded into place.

It was done, but it didn't feel complete.

An idea sparked in Hot Rod's processor. "His swords," he said meekly. "He would want them."

Shakily, Hot Rod stood.

Megatron was at his side not a moment later. "I will get them."

"No. I have to do this." Hot Rod gave him a grateful look, but forced his pedes to walk. Megatron kept by him and caught him every time he stumbled, helping to right him and continue on. He did accept his offer to hold the swords once he retrieved them, though. He didn't think he could hold even a data pad then.

Hot Rod resumed the position beside the coffin as Megatron lay the swords atop the coffin. As though he had read Hot Rod's mind, he placed them crossed, and once Hot Rod nodded in approval, he welded them to it.

"It's perfect," Hot Rod sad sadly as Megatron circled the coffin until he was behind his conjunx. He turned to look at him, and found Megatron's offered hand. He took it, and Megatron helped him stand and then started to lead him away from the casket.

"Wait!" Hot Rod surprised even himself with the volume he achieved with that word. Even more so as he yelped with pain as he tore off a pointed piece of his chest. He placed it just above where Drift's swords crossed. Where his spark would have been. He turned back to see Megatron watching him with optics full of pain. "Now he has a piece of me," he explained quietly.

Megatron nodded solemnly, talking the steps to join his conjunx so he could weld this last important piece on.

"Now you," Megatron said, holding out his hand for Hot Rod's. Once he had it, palm up, he did his best to clean it, and then spot welded it so that energon no longer leaked from the cut. "I can properly weld it once we get a chance to clean it."

"It's fine." Hot Rod pulled his hand back. "Doesn't hurt." He turned dim optics to the coffin. "He won't even get a funeral..."

"Yes, he will."

"How?" Hot Rod's voice held no hope.

"I will perform it."

"Do you even know what's supposed to happen at a Spectralist funeral?!" Hot Rod rounded on him, screaming. Megatron just watched him with the same solemn face as Hot Rod hugged himself, his helm and spoiler sagging. "Because *I* don't. I didn't even care to learn about Spectralism."

Megatron rested a hand on Hot Rod's shoulder and didn't speak until his optics met his conjunx's. "I have officiated more than my fair share of funerals," Megatron explained, his voice dragged with a somber weight. "Though it has been a long time. War... Many of my troops joined the Allspark without even a grave all their own."

Hot Rod bowed his helm in respect.

"I would be honoured to officiate, if you wish me to," Megatron said.

"Please," Hot Rod whispered. He lifted his flickering gaze to Megatron's face. "Give him a proper send-off. Worthy of a warrior, a mentor, and a most trusted friend."

"Anything less would do him a disservice," Megatron agreed. "Though I am afraid I do not have the proper attire."

Hot Rod shook his helm a little. "Primus will understand. As will Drift. He was always so understanding..."

"Alright."

Megatron walked to the head of the coffin while Hot Rod took to the base, sitting and laying a hand on it. Though he knew it was just his imagination, it felt as if it was humming with Drift's life energy.

Megatron's solemn voice carried quietly to the only mech in attendance, who mourned with enough flickering optics and static for a whole platoon. His love for Drift moved even Megatron as he spoke with words that felt foreign on his glossa, but had never left the spark of the old warlord. The same spark that had carried him through the early years of this long war. The one who had vowed to attend, and whenever possible, officiate every funeral for his soldiers.

How naive he had been.

"I knew Drift," Megatron said. "Though I gave him a different name, and though I only knew him as the warrior Deadlock, I have come to understand that it was a privilege to know him at all."

He paused when Hot Rod gave a staticky hiccup. Though he saw none of his conjunx's optics, he gave him a sympathetic look before continuing.

"He was kind and caring, and the world has suffered a great loss with his passing," he continued. "I regret that I was not awarded the great honour of knowing him late in life, as his amica did. Perhaps our only solace in this time of grief, is knowing that he will live on in the lives he touched, so long as we remember him."

While Megatron spoke, Hot Rod slowly draped more of himself across the coffin until half of him was laying on it. He didn't even notice that Megatron had stopped talking, nor the long, somber look he gave him.

"War can... war can warp one's perception of things." Megatron looked at the coffin for a long while. "Death changes from a great tragedy to just another part of life. It is not a choice to see it this way, but a means of survival. To wallow in such sorrow, day in and out, would crush even the strongest bot. Some may see this as a strength, but it is not. No one should be accustomed to death. Grief is a natural process, and..." He sighed. "Drift deserved a much longer life. He chose the path of peace in a world consumed by hatred. It is a difficult path to travel at all times, but especially in these times. If I can ever be half the mech Drift was, I will have lived a life worth living."

Megatron stopped and folded his hands neatly, bowing his helm for the moment of silence. Only Hot Rod's shuddering ventilation's found his audials, and each one twisted his spark until he could bear it no more.

He walked over to him and stooped down so he could hold him and share the burden. Being forced

to listen to his grieving drained Megatron of whatever bloodlust remained in his spark. If he ever had to recount where the war truly ended, he would cite this moment. It was perhaps the least fatal of all the battles, but the death radiated out from the site and darkened the world more than Megatron ever imagined.

The war culminated here. Every choice Megatron had ever made lead up to the death of his conjunx's amica. He slew Drift. His still-drying energon stained his hands.

"I am so sorry," Megatron whispered. He could have gone on and on and let a million years' worth of apologies spring forth, but that would comfort him more than it would comfort Hot Rod. Instead, he held him closer, trying to steal his sorrow through osmosis.

Hot Rod tried to pry Megatron's arms off of him.

"Am I hurting you?" Megatron asked quietly.

Hot Rod shook his helm. "It is my turn to speak."

"You do not need to say anything," Megatron assured him. "Drift knows you care." He kept his hand out, touching Hot Rod's harm, but did not hinder his attempts to stand. "He would not want you to push yourself past your limits."

Hot Rod shook his helm. "I have to say good-bye."

"Then say it from here," Megatron pleaded. "Drift will not care where you are."

He shook his helm again. "I wanna do it properly. I don't... I mean, what if it doesn't count? I should have learned more about his religion... Some amica I am."

"You are a wonderful amica, Hot Rod. If you are half the amica as you are a conjunx, then Drift was the luckiest mech in the world." He watched Hot Rod struggle with sympathy and pain in his optics. He stood, gently lifting his conjunx by his elbows to help him get to his pedes.

"I've got it," Hot Rod refused quietly, even though Megatron's hands had helped him twice now, and continued to guide him to the coffin's head. "Thank you," he whispered, trying to keep the bitterness from it.

Megatron took a step back, but that was all he would give him, it seemed. Probably a good idea, but now Hot Rod had no one to speak to. Nothing but an empty expanse found his optics, but he knew that returning to the Sanctuary would only patron this event with those who felt obligated to attend, and that would have been so much worse. Fake sympathy. Half-sparked, no, one eighth-sparked condolences. Optimus and Ultra Magnus in attendance even though they spent *years* telling Hot Rod how he should find some better company. Just the thought of something so disrespectful brought bitterness to his spark.

Hot Rod glared at the vast emptiness with clenched fists, feeling as though he had enough energy to take on the world. If only this anger could bring Drift back, but it wouldn't. He saw what bitterness and hatred brought forth. War. Death. A barely surviving planet.

Drift was gone. Nothing could bring him back, but he should have at least had a proper send off. How could only one person care for him? Did an allegiance to Megatron condemn someone for life?

Hot Rod glanced back at Megatron. He didn't look at his face, but at the Decepticon symbol. The thing that had killed Drift in more ways than one. He turned back to look at the coffin, desperately trying to not blame Megatron for all of this. It would be far too easy. He started the war. He

created Deadlock. If he had never approached him... But then, if the mines had not broken him, perhaps he would have taken a different path. He wouldn't have him here with him. He wouldn't have a conjunx, and maybe he never would have met Drift... Blaming Megatron would get him nowhere but alone and miserable.

But then, wasn't that his fate?

"Drift deserved a better funeral," Hot Rod said sadly, deciding to speak instead of spiraling down this path of what-ifs. "There should have been more people here, but... they wouldn't give him a second chance. Yet Drift had the brightest spark of anyone I knew. He..." He swallowed around the lump in his throat. "He was on my side even when the world was against me. I... Drift, what am I going to do without you?"

The silence that stretched out between them felt stifling yet necessary. Drift deserved a moment where he considered how terrible the world would be without him. He deserved to know that he would be missed.

He deserved more than Hot Rod could give, but his knees began to buckle under the stress and his helm swam from an improper fueling. What Megatron had given him would not last much longer. He was there to save him again as he tried to walk, but stumbled. Megatron caught him, taking all of his weight so that Hot Rod didn't have to stand.

"I will not offer you false comforts," Megatron murmured. "That Primus needed an angel back, or that he is in a better place."

"Death just hurts," Hot Rod agreed bitterly. "It does not happen for a reason."

Megatron nodded. "But I will tell you that life goes on."

Hot Rod's optics dimmed. Quietly, he asked, "When?"

"Now," Megatron said just as quietly. He took a slack hold of Hot Rod's hand that he made more secure when Hot Rod gripped him tight. "It will go on even when you wish it would stop. You can take a break from it--"

Hot Rod shook his helm.

"Right," Megatron corrected, giving his hand a squeeze. "Tonight, at least," he tried to comfort him. "Life will continue, though, no matter what any of us does. Right now, as we speak, there is life, and it will not care for your suffering. But I do. I care, and I will fend off as much of life as I can so that you may grieve. If that means that I no longer am in your company, then--"

"No. Stay. *Please*." Hot Rod hid his face against Megatron's shoulder. "I can't even tell anyone what happened, I wasn't, I wasn't supposed to be out here! No one will even notice that he's... Oh, Drift..."

Megatron drew him in for a hug. He curled as much of himself around Hot Rod as he could, leaving a kiss on the top of his helm. "The sun's light wanes on this day," he murmured. "May I escort you home?"

Hot Rod hiccupped and gripped Megatron tighter when his knees began to buckle. "Will you stay with me?" he asked, his voice barely audible through the static.

"For as long as you need me," Megatron said gently.

Night's grip had firmly cemented itself on the land by the time the pair spied the lights of the Sanctuary. Both grief and low energon levels hindered their journey.

The gentle glow of the Sanctuary mocked Hot Rod. Look how bright the world still is! It was all a lie. Drift had been the light there. The one who had brought joy to the joyless life his mentor forced upon him. Now all that remained was a room Drift would never grace with his presence, and a countdown quickly nearing zero.

"I can't do it," Hot Rod said quietly once they reached the Sanctuary walls and transformed to root mode. "I don't have the energy."

Megatron looked up to the top of the wall, then back to Hot Rod. "Could you handle holding on?" He knelt down with his back to Hot Rod. "I can carry you."

Hot Rod's lip trembled and his frame shook. "I-I think I can."

Still on his knees, Megatron turned to face his conjunx. He kissed his chest and then hugged him, allowing Hot Rod to throw his weight onto him and share the burden of his grief. "I am sorry, my Sun. If I had... if I had kept a better watch, perhaps..."

Hot Rod shook his helm. "Don't."

"He lives on so long as you remember him," Megatron murmured.

Hot Rod shook so much it made Megatron shake, as well. A sob left his frame. "What if I can't?"

Megatron said nothing to that. He just hugged him tighter. Once Hot Rod's shaking was contained to just his hands, Megatron let him go and once again turned his back to him. He got as low as he was able to aid Hot Rod in climbing onto his back. Once he had his arms around his neck, he stood slowly, asking, "Do you have a good grip?"

"Mhm..." Hot Rod burrowed his face into his back.

"Hold on tight," Megatron said as he began his ascent.

And he did. Halfway up, though, dark thoughts found him. Let go. *Join Drift*. He fought them, but they were strong and he was weak. Thankfully, Megatron was a swift climber. Swifter, now that he'd had the practice. They reached the top and quickly descended. At the base of the wall, Megatron picked Hot Rod up and cradled him in his arms.

They walked through the courtyard, neither of them even *thinking* about checking for optics watching them. They were too focused on sparks grieving or gone.

The climb to Hot Rod's balcony was, thankfully, too brief to allow dangerous thoughts to worm their way into his processor. Megatron knelt down to allow him to get off, and then pulled the slightly ajar door open, a hand on the small of Hot Rod's back to guide him.

All Hot Rod wanted to do was fall onto his berth and never get up, but Megatron walked him to his washracks instead. He'd numbed himself so much that he barely registered the sticky feel of dried energon anymore.

With gentle strokes and somber optics, Megatron set to work cleaning them both of the memories of bloodshed. If only the soapy sponge could wipe Hot Rod's processor of memories. He could take

away Drift, and the hurt, before tomorrow stole them away anyways.

The towel was soft. Hot Rod couldn't appreciate the softness, or the care Megatron took to dry him off, but he was aware of these things.

Though it would only be a handful of steps, Megatron carried his conjunx to his berth. He set him down and pulled the blanket up around him. Hot Rod tucked it more tightly around himself.

"Where is your energon store?" Megatron asked once the blanket hid all but Hot Rod's helm.

Hot Rod nodded in its direction, and as Megatron made his way to it, he said, "I'm not hungry."

"You do not *feel* hungry," Megatron corrected him. "You need fresh energon. Mine will not sustain you for as long." He gave him a sympathetic glance as he opened the cabinet. "It might even make you feel a little better. I know that it hurts, my love, but Drift would not want your health to deteriorate."

"Will it heal me by tomorrow?" Hot Rod asked. Static overcame his voice until the last word out of his mouth was nearly consumed by it.

Megatron said nothing else as he prepared the ration, nor as he walked over. It was only once the glass was in Hot Rod's hands and he had taken a sip, after a few pointed looks from Megatron, that he spoke. "No. There is nothing that either you or I can do that will stave off this hurt by tomorrow, or even a week from now."

Hot Rod said nothing as he looked into his shaking glass of energon.

"Drink, my love. Drink and grieve. You are permitted this night to feel whatever comes as honestly as you can. It will do you no good to repress your emotions, so let them come. I will be right here, for comfort or space, whatever you desire."

"Comfort."

Megatron climbed into the berth next to him, resting his back on the backboard, then he wrapped an arm around Hot Rod so he could lean on him.

"Would you prefer silence, or a distraction?"

"Distraction."

Megatron nodded. Going far back into his databanks, to the memories he usually reserved for war, he found a song. It served no significance beyond a thing for him and the other miners to sing while they worked, but it was a fond memory among misery. Perhaps it could be that light in the darkness for him, too.

Hot Rod snuggled closer as Megatron's rich timbre flowed into his audials. The deep notes found his aching spark and saw to coat it in a coolness that provided an instant relief that was better than any high. If Megatron had not been there, he would have already been halfway to the bottom of a bottle. His sorrow would deepen when he remembered that Drift drank from the same spout, and he would mourn that he could never again enjoy the lightness of processor and frame with his amica ever again.

Once the energon settled in his tank, with only a slight nausea to it, Hot Rod found Megatron's free hand and held it, turning more towards him.

The song in his audial grew quieter as Megatron was able to get his mouth closer. A song just for him. A song that Megatron would force an occasional pause into to allow him to kiss his helm.

"I'm sorry," Hot Rod whispered during one of those pauses.

"There is nothing for you to apologize for," Megatron whispered back.

"But there is." Hot Rod's voice came out dull. "Drift..." He swallowed. "His will be but the first death you must endure in such a short time."

"Stop." Megatron hid his face against the side of Hot Rod's helm.

"My funeral date is set in the temple tomorrow."

"It is a change," Megatron said. "Not a fatal one."

"Say what you will to Hot Rod tonight," he continued, all but ignoring his conjunx. "He will remember you until the Matrix makes room for more pertinent information."

"I won't lose another," Megatron whispered, barely audible.

Hot Rod unfurled just enough to put an arm around Megatron. His spark felt no love nor pain. Just numbness.

"You do not have a choice."

Chapter 16

"Hot Rod!" Ultra Magnus burst into his room without even a knock that morning. "We only have--"

Hot Rod lifted emotionless optics from the floor and stood, the cape falling regally around his frame. His Autobot symbol caught the light as he turned to face Ultra Magnus, a fresh coat of wax making it stand out from his clean, but not overly-buffed, frame.

"I am ready," Hot Rod said levelly.

"Yes. Good. Well then, let's not waste daylight." Ultra Magnus turned, confusion and a smidgen of fear taking over his optics.

Hot Rod followed, the weight of the cape feeling ten times heavier than ever. While they walked, Ultra Magnus spoke.

"Optimus is already in the temple, giving his thanks to Primus. You will wait until he comes to fetch you, and then you will say the Oath and your vows."

Hot Rod said, "Yes, sir," even though they had run through this a dozen times, and verbally run through it another fifty. He would not fight them today. There was no point, even if he had the energy.

The courtyard was empty of all souls beyond theirs, but Hot Rod still felt optics on him. They peeked out from behind curtains or through cracked doors. They watched the mech they had seen many a time with even more awe than before. Hot Rod paid them no mind. He didn't care about them anymore. He didn't care about anything.

Outside of the temple, however, was a single guard who stood stiffly, not looking at either Hot Rod or Ultra Magnus. He had been permitted his sword that day. If someone tried to interrupt the ceremony, the first energon might be spilled upon these grounds.

"Lift your helm," Ultra Magnus hissed at Hot Rod as they approached. "A Prime carries himself with pride!"

Hot Rod obeyed, but he couldn't bring undeserved pride to his optics. He hadn't earned a reason to be proud yet, and he certainly wouldn't as a Prime, either. The best he could hope for was a passable reign, but even that seemed unlikely.

"Wait here," Ultra Magnus instructed.

Hot Rod stopped before the double doors, holding stiffly. He didn't turn to watch Ultra Magnus leave, nor at any other noise. He just kept his dull gaze forward. Waiting. His final bout of waiting. Everything came to a head here. With his lukewarm vows hastily written when his grief morphed to numbness, and a heavy cape dragging him down.

He didn't know how long he stood there for. Time dragged on regardless of what he was doing, so only the shift of the shadows could tell him how much time had truly passed. Even then, he couldn't be bothered to check them. Time was meaningless once he was out of it.

Hot Rod's optics lifted just a tad when the doors parted. Just enough for him to meet Optimus' gaze.

"Come, Hot Rod," he said. "It is time."

He didn't nod or speak. He just took the few steps that brought him into the dark temple. As he walked towards the altar, Optimus opened the skylight, and the light dazzled his optics, but even then he didn't flinch. Any feeling was welcome at that point.

Hot Rod stopped before the steps. He heard Optimus moving somewhere to his right, but he didn't turn to look. Though they had never used the actual relic in any of their run-throughs before, he knew what he was getting. The Hot Rod of a few days ago might have been curious and taken a glance, but the Hot Rod of today kept his helm forward even as Optimus placed it upon him.

The Crown of the Primes weighed much heavier on Hot Rod's helm, even though the one Megatron had given him, still hidden in his subspace, could not have weighed much less. It felt as though it held the weight of all of Cybertron. It threatened to snap his neck and end his reign before it could even begin.

That would be the kindest of ends.

"I will leave you to your prayers," Optimus said quietly. His pedesteps echoed as he retreated outside.

An hour. An hour they would leave him in here. To pray. To commune with Primus one final time. To reflect on his vows and his place in this world.

An hour alone with his thoughts. His dark and empty thoughts. Where his idle mind would find more time to mourn, and more time to jam the knife lodged in there even deeper. Until the pain consumed him, frame and soul.

At this time during his ceremony, Optimus would have gotten to his knees, his hands folded in front of him. Hot Rod, instead, fell to his, and if it weren't for his hands there to catch him, he would have fallen the whole way.

Hot Rod's helm fell as the pain found him and wracked his frame with shakes and static. The crown fell, too, hitting the ground with a loud *clang*. It echoed for longer than any other sound Hot Rod had ever heard, and if he'd had the space to feel surprise in his spark, he would have been surprised to not see Optimus come running in to see what had gone wrong.

Everything, Optimus. Everything had gone wrong. So much that wrongness now felt right, and if right were to come his way, he might mistake it for wrongness. He couldn't tell up from down, left from right... It all blurred into one fearsome thing.

"Primus!" Hot Rod shouted suddenly, raising his face to the ceiling. "What do you want from me?" The shout fell to a whisper in just a few short words. His tank was as full as could be, and yet no energy found his limbs.

"I don't, I don't want this..." he admitted quietly. He shrank in on himself, half expecting a bolt of lightning to strike him, or the ceiling to cave in. Primus would smite him and find another to bestow his holy light on. Someone capable. Someone ready. And most importantly, someone who *wanted* to be Prime. "I want Drift." He lifted somber optics to the heavens. "I want..." He let them drop again, to trembling hands. "I want Megatron. I want to know what life I may have with him. Primus..." He looked up again. "If his love is true, then we will end this war! But I cannot do that if I am bonded to you. I need to be with him. I... I don't know..."

Of course, no one answered him. He should have expected as much, but on this day, maybe, just

maybe... The last bit of hope he had was snuffed. He was going to be Prime, and neither he nor Primus thought that he should be.

Cybertron will burn.

Hot Rod laughed. A sad laugh. A desperate one.

"Has he, too, rejected me?" Hot Rod asked nobody, because nobody was listening. "Would I have heard you if I had not gone to him? Have I ruined everything in just a few short days? Have I doomed Cybertron by dreaming for love?" He shook his helm, an unsettling smile making his cheeks hurt. "I risked it all and lost. That is what I do. I *lose*. I have lost Megatron. I have lost *Cybertron*. I have lost my wonderful amica... All for a love that was not meant to be, and will not be..."

Hot Rod bit his lip. He expected no answer, and yet...

"I am supposed to use this time to reflect on my vows," Hot Rod said. "But I need you to answer me!" He would beg, if that would achieve his goal. "What is the point of doing this--of doing *any* of this--if I do not even know if you will pass the Matrix on to me?"

Nothing. No sound nor sign.

Hot Rod bowed until his helm nearly touched the ground. "Please. Just one word... Am I meant to be the next Prime?"

Silence.

"Please..." Hot Rod lay down on the floor. The coolness of it sapped his heat while the sun fed him more; he cycled between too cold and too hot until he numbed himself to temperature, too.

"Can I at least speak to Drift?" he asked, his voice barely audible. He barely registered that he had spoken at all. Words and thoughts spiralled through and out of him without his knowledge or consent as to which sprang forth. His frame no longer responded to him. It did as it pleased. "Just tell me that he passed quickly. That he did not have to suffer. That he *is* in a better place. Somewhere he is not shunned for his past. Somewhere he is *loved*."

This silence hurt the most.

What use were his vows? He could say anything--anything at all!--but none of it would matter. Not while Primus refused to speak to him. Not if the Matrix rejected him. Not if he could not share this new life with amica and conjunx... If he still had a conjunx.

The empty berth he'd woken up to that morning had hurt more than any other lonely morning. To fall asleep wrapped in comforting arms and wake without them slapped even his numb face into pain. But he was thankful for the ache. In all his attempts to distract from it, he'd gotten ready. He'd taken a shower, gave himself a quick buff with tired arms, and fastened the cape to his shoulders. His mirror had found him a regal mech. He looked the part, but it was only plating-deep.

With shivering limbs and shaking ventilations, Hot Rod picked himself up off the floor. Primus, if he truly could see all, may find him defeated, but he would make sure that Optimus did not. He had faked his readiness, his worthiness, for millennia; he could fake it for another day. He could fake it until Drift and Megatron were wiped from his processor to make way for more prudent information. He could fake it until he didn't have to anymore.

He stooped down to retrieve the, thankfully, undamaged crown, and in his weakness almost ended

up back where he started, but he managed to right himself. With shaking arms, he placed the crown on his helm once more, and it felt as if its weight had tripled since its tumble. It was as if his sins had found it on the floor and possessed it. He would bear it, though. He would bear it all.

Standing in the silence felt like an eternity, but all time felt like that now. This was just an eternity without distractions. But like all other eternities he had endured, this, too, ended. Eventually, the double doors parted once more to allow Optimus entry, washing Hot Rod in more of the sun's warmth that didn't reach the components that truly needed warming.

Optimus said nothing as he walked to Hot Rod's side. Once he was in his peripheries, he asked, "Are you ready?"

"I... am, but..." Hot Rod bit his lip, wishing he could take back that "but."

A tense moment of silence passed.

"... But?" Optimus asked with a twinge of annoyance.

Somehow, after everything, hope still found its way into Hot Rod's spark. Nothing more than a flicker, but it opened his mouth and allowed forbidden words to tumble from lips that should spill nothing but the Oath and his vows.

"Optimus, I must ask you something." Hot Rod's fear and respect had him not turning fully towards his mentor, but he still caught the flash of anger in his optics.

"This is highly unusual," Optimus said, "but speak."

"My bond to the Matrix..." Hot Rod saw Optimus bristle but continued. "Is it so binding that a bond to another is impossible? Or is it forbidden for a Prime to love?"

Optimus moved towards him. Though he did not come within arm's reach, Hot Rod felt the threat in his posture. "Why would you even allow such a question to broach your mind, let alone actually *ask* such a thing in the holiest of places?"

"I am sorry." Hot Rod bowed his helm. "Curiosity plagues my naive spark."

"Even so, there are some questions that ought not be asked."

Hot Rod's helm fell further until he feared the crown may slip from it again. Another stain on his legacy that was still a fledgling. His wings would never fully form. Primus would reject him outright.

"No Prime has ever taken a conjunx, for we are betrothed to Primus, himself," Optimus explained, regardless. "Adultery such as what you are suggesting would not only be sacrilegious, but may very well kill whom the Prime attempts to woo. Only the chosen few bear sparks that are worthy, but these worthy sparks have been deemed worthy by their ability to carry what the Matrix offers. To try and bond that to a mere mortal could prove fatal. Though none have ever tried, and I *hope*--" He let that word hang in the air, echoing back around them. "--that none will ever make such an attempt."

"Of course. I apologize once more, Optimus. I will not ask any more questions."

"Good." Optimus nodded at the altar. "Proceed."

Hot Rod stepped up to the altar and swallowed before the first words of the Oath tumbled from trembling lips.

Chapter 17

This could not come to pass!

Megatron cursed his slow alt mode. Designed for battle, but not speed. As soon as he saw the Sanctuary, he transformed to his root mode and *ran*. It would get him there faster. He had to push through his exhaustion. He had no time to waste!

He cursed that he ever left, too. He had stayed with his sleeping prince, finally finding some peace in resting, until the sun trickled in through the window and found his frame. He had kissed him, apologized, and then fled out the balcony before he could be discovered.

What a coward he had been.

He should have stayed. Should have fought for his love. For his right to *choose*. Was that not why he had begun this war in the first place? And here he was, neglecting to give that right to choose to the one he proclaimed to love so dearly. He left him. He left him to fate. He left him when he needed him *most*.

Even if he managed to get there in time, he did not deserve to have him, but Hot Rod did deserve to be able to choose if he wanted to be Prime. In his own time.

"Primus," Megatron said through his panting, "if you do exist, you will aid my legs and stall Hot Rod's. You will help me get to him. Not for my sake, but for his."

He cast a glance to the heavens, and immediately regretted it when he stumbled. He righted himself, but he couldn't help but see that as a sign. A more religious mech might have given up then. But Megatron? He, ironically, put more faith in his atheism and vowed to keep his optics forward for the rest of the journey. He would not allow anything to hinder his progress!

He would get to Hot Rod no matter what got in his way.

Still, his frame held him back. Old war injuries. Aging joints. Brittle armour. It all sought to deter him.

Faster, he urged it. *Faster!*

He pushed himself even harder. Now he could hear the strain. The creaking and the clunking as his old parts moved faster than they had in a long while. He huffed and ducked his helm down, searching inside of himself for some cache of energy to dip into. *Anything*. Time was running out.

"I will never leave your side," Megatron panted, hoping, and yes, even praying to a god he didn't believe in, that his words would reach Hot Rod. "Never again. I will protect you. I will protect my Prime."

Somehow, with a frame threatening to collapse beneath the stress, Megatron still found the strength to climb the Sanctuary wall. He all but tore through it, and he would tear through anyone who tried to keep them apart.

He landed hard on the ground, and got up quickly, ready to face--

No one, evidently.

He straightened slowly, cautiously, looking left and right, but he didn't see even one other bot. In the middle of the day. He expected a challenge, or at least for the alarm to be raised, but nothing happened.

He should be thankful. Hot Rod wouldn't want him to hurt anybody. He could get to him *without* violence. He had to.

Though his legs ached, Megatron forced himself to run to the temple. He could only hope that the ceremony was long and arduous. Anything to give him more time.

So desperate was he in his task, that he didn't notice the guard in front of him until his sword met with Megatron's chassis. His shaking hands and poor stance meant that it only cut into his plating, and not so far as to draw energon. Megatron slowly raised his hands in surrender.

"I will not harm you," Megatron assured him. "For you are of Hot Rod's. Sworn to protect the young Prime, yes?" Though his question was rhetorical, the mech still nodded fearfully. "Worry not. You should only worry if your attempts to protect him keep him from the very mech who is wanting of his true protection. It is not I he requires protection from, but rather the one you currently call 'Prime.' The one who has taken him inside these holy walls to trap him to this life that *he* says is destined for him. But an unwanted destiny is not destiny at all. Destiny is chosen for you, yes, but if that destiny is not, in return, chosen, then it was never a destiny meant for them. So tell me, Autobot, do you still intend to keep me from *my* chosen destiny?"

"I cannot, I, I c-cannot let you pass," he stuttered. His sword shook in his hands, and his stance would leave his attacks ineffectual if he tried to attack him. This mech had never seen the front lines. That much was clear. Megatron could defeat him with his fists alone, but violence would only lead to more violence here.

"Gaze upon my spark." Megatron opened his chest, watching the fear and anger turn to awe and confusion as the light washed over him. Grabbing the mech's hand, he brought it near to his life force. "If you believe me a threat, then I allow you the chance to snuff it out. For a life without Hot Rod is not one worth living, even if my forces yet prevail. But I pray that you will see the love that emanates from my spark. A love for Hot Rod that I cannot quell, no matter which faction he may be a part of. If I allow him to take the Oath without a fight, then our story will end here and now, and you might as well have killed me before that pain could reach me. But if you stand aside, I have a chance at getting to him before the ancients do. Before Optimus does. And you may have very well have ended our war here, on these very grounds. What side of history do you want to be on, when all is said and done? What choice will you make?"

A new fear found its home in the mech's optics. The fear of a mech deranged. And perhaps he was, but his craziness was borne of love, and a desperate need to see his lover happy.

"I do not ask you to trust me," Megatron went on when the mech made no movement for or against killing him. "I do not expect you to, nor would it be wise to do so. What I am asking you to trust is more noble: love, itself. I love Hot Rod."

Flares and tendrils broke off from his spark. They seemed to reach out for the mech, though, really, they were trying to reach beyond him. Through the door and past his conjunx's chest plating, right to where his spark sat, ready to accept his offering. The mech, rightfully, watched this with fear growing in his field, and he struggled, but Megatron held firm.

"Hot Rod would not want me to kill you," Megatron said, letting an edge sneak into his voice. "Nor would he want me to even hurt you. But I cannot allow you to stand in my way. Not if it means Hot Rod loses his *choice*. He may very well reject me, but if that is his choice, the thing he *truly*

wants, I will go quietly. If you continue to hinder me, he may not be able to have that choice."

Megatron pleaded with this mech through his optics and field. He left everything as open and honest as he could, and released his hand. He kept his chest within reach, though, even as the mech's hand retreated to his frame.

The mech swallowed. "I cannot let you pass," he repeated. "I cannot let *anyone* pass. Those are my orders."

"From *Optimus*, no doubt," Megatron growled. He shook his helm. Anger would not help him at this moment. "Please. I will get down on my knees and beg, if I must."

"I-I--" His shaking finally had him dropping his sword.

"I came here unarmed," he pointed out. "Is that enough to make you believe that I do not intend Hot Rod--" he put his hand near his spark as it flared again, "--my *conjunx*, harm?"

"It matters not, I cannot--"

"Then do not let me pass!" Megatron roared suddenly. "Go! Raise the alarm! I will recount how valiantly you fought to keep me out! I would sooner lie about a battle almost lost, than be forced to hurt you.

"Hot Rod has made me a changed mech. He has reminded me that we all should be given a choice. That was the very reason I *started* the war, but time and many millennia of battle have made me forgotten. Hot Rod has begun me on the correct path again.

"I made my choice all those years ago. I chose violence. All it has done is crippled our population and all but killed the planet I claim to love. If Hot Rod is by my side, I can do anything. We can find a peaceful end to this war. We can find a way to rebuild. I can fix what I have broken. *You* are the one thing that stands in my way. So tell me, will you stand aside in the name of peace and love, or will you force me into one more act of violence?"

The mech still said nothing. Did nothing.

"Do not tempt a desperate mech!" Fear of what might come to pass filled Megatron's field and engulfed the both of them. "Please. What must I do for you to allow me entrance? Or to at least step out of my path?"

Wide optics and a shaking frame was his only response.

"Wound me! *Maim* me! Whatever it takes so that you see that I am not a threat!" He pleaded as much as he could through his optics. Perhaps logic would reach him. "What plan could I possibly have? If I intended to kill Hot Rod I would have no qualms with killing a random Autobot guard. *Please!*"

The guard's optics twitched down and Megatron could practically hear the gears turning in his processor. Before they could pop back up, he pushed past him and charged through the doors. He'd deal with him if he followed. He had to get to him.

He found the temple as he had left it: dark apart from the shaft of sunlight that fell upon a regal Hot Rod. All that was visible above the cape spreading across the small flight of stairs before the altar was his helm, adorned with a crown. Not the crown he had given him, though, but the same one he had seen on Optimus' helm all those years ago.

“Hot Rod!”

At his call, his beloved turned, the dazzling light of his spark illuminating his plating and turning it the same pale blue. It fell on his face, highlighting the sorrow that had consumed it.

“I’m sorry,” was all he said.

“You are not welcome here,” a far more commanding voice spoke, and Optimus stepped out of the shadows created by Hot Rod’s spark. “Only Primes or Primes to-be may stand on this ground, and you, Megatron, are neither.”

“Tell me you are to-be, Hot Rod. Tell me that what cannot be undone has not yet been done. Tell me that we can still be.” Ignoring Optimus’ annoying presence entirely, he took a step closer to Hot Rod. Hands held tentatively before him, pleading. Begging. Far too hopeful for his own good.

“Speak, little one. Speak your true words. Spare me this torment!”

Blue optics kept to the ground.

“You will address him properly,” Optimus stepped in front of him and forced Megatron’s attention onto his enemy, “or not at all. Rodimus Prime will bond with the Matrix as was foretold. He will carry on the legacy, and it is sacrilege to try and stop him.”

Chapter 18

A roar burned Megatron's throat as he charged at Optimus, not even considering that Hot Rod—he would not call him Prime!—stood behind him. He had more sense than Megatron and, thankfully, dodged. Blind with rage, his punches rarely landed as squarely as they would have if he had the sense to plan his moves.

"He deserves the right to *choose*!" Megatron shouted through his blows.

Optimus rammed the butt of his sword against Megatron's abdomen, and while he was recovering, he finished drawing it and his weapon found Megatron's frame again, this time with the deadlier end. Not a fatal wound. Not yet, anyways, but it still bled magenta that dripped to the floor as Megatron staggered back.

"Do not fight him!" Hot Rod pleaded as he struggled to disentangle himself from the cape wrapped around his frame. He winced as something brushed his spark, and closed his chest. "Please, Optimus, he means me no harm!"

"Save your voice, Hot Rod," Optimus said quietly, but with the threat clear in his voice. "There is nothing you can say that will justify allowing Megatron to live."

"I love him!" Hot Rod screamed this so loud his voice box popped.

"*What?*" At the very least, it caused Optimus to falter, and even turn his helm towards Hot Rod. But then his optics turned to slits as he regarded Megatron once more. The tip of his sword found Megatron's neck, now pulled taut to avoid it as he raised his hands in surrender. In a low voice, Optimus asked, "What did you do to him?"

"Sheath your sword!" Hot Rod begged. He finally managed to get his pedes free and got to them, holding his hands out peacefully. "You do not need your weapon in this house of peace. You shall not fight on this day."

"I still carry the Matrix," Optimus said, and Megatron gave a visible sigh of relief. "You hold no authority over me, Hot Rod. Now stand back so I can take care of something I should have dealt with a long time ago."

"Please, I beg of you!" Hot Rod tugged at Optimus' arm and he shook him off easily. "This is a house of peace!"

"One that Megatron has defiled!" Optimus charged at Megatron, swinging his sword, thankfully, through the air as Megatron just barely dodged his attack. Optimus staggered, his optics glowing bright with rage as he turned to find Megatron's fist colliding with his face.

"Stand down, Megatron!" Hot Rod shouted, pleading with him. "Violence is not the answer!"

Megatron grunted as he narrowly missed the sting of Optimus' sword again. "Given that he is--ngh!" The tip of his blade caught his arm as he tried to escape its radius, but Optimus came again and again, giving no pause for thought and certainly not for words, though Megatron still forced them out. "I will not give him up without a fight!"

Megatron caught Optimus' hands, and they both grunted as Optimus fought against equally matched strength; a perpetual stalemate. In this brief reprieve from battle, if it could be called that, Hot Rod horrifically noticed Megatron's empty scabbard, remembering it lying useless on the ground by

Drift's coffin.

The alarm found and fled his frame as Optimus' field found him. Anger borne of his mentor, brought forth by the stifling cloud of rage surrounding the two locked in battle, found and nestled in Hot Rod's frame, no matter how hard he fought to keep it out. The fear found his spark, instead, insulated by a thin, but resilient layer of love that kept the war's hatred from his core.

"This is not a fair fight!" Hot Rod tried pleading with Optimus, instead. Silently, he sent one last prayer to Primus to allow him to appeal to Optimus' good nature. The nature he had been told time and again to be the purest in this time of war. The one who would fight the scourge that plagued Cybertron. The scourge that paled in his truth, and who he had fallen in love with, and whose life now hung in the balance, dependant on Optimus' mercy. "Please, let us talk this out! This can only end in tragedy!"

The only response he received was the grunts and cries of battle, overlaid with the swing of a sword and fists. Even worse, he heard the sickening sound of metal being crushed and cut when they met.

"What good will come of this?" Hot Rod shouted, but his voice lost much of its power to the chaos of emotions quickly filling the temple. Was it destiny for him to succumb to this battle, too? And if so, which side would he find himself allied with? "Optimus, our war cannot end this way!"

"It will end, Hot Rod," Optimus said, somehow hearing him over the din. He got another blow in, and Megatron staggered back, holding his new wound and panting, while Optimus turned to face Hot Rod. "Megatron's chapter has been long and arduous, but even the longest chapters have their end. In time, you will forget him, as you will forget Drift."

Drift.

The anger made an easy route for the grief and guilt as it slunk familiarly through seams in his armour. His thoughts flashed back to his coffin, still out there, unprotected from the elements. It was disrespectful, really. And he called himself his *amica*.

Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, another of Megatron's pained cries broke him from his past despair to his present.

"Please," Hot Rod begged at the next pause in the fight. Both sides looked haggard, but Megatron bore more wounds, and some bled with reckless abandon. "Please, Optimus. I will..." Hot Rod swallowed, shutting his optics tight so he would not have to see his face while he said this. "I renounce Megatron's love."

A faint, "no," from Megatron found Hot Rod's audials.

"I renounce his love," he repeated. He opened his optics, but looked away from them both. "I renounce him as my conjunx. I will even renounce ever knowing him intimately. *Please*. I will do anything as long as you let him live." After a few long moments of silence--blissful, almost, after the sounds of war--Hot Rod forced himself to look at his mentor and not at Megatron, no matter how much his spark begged him to. "Please, Optimus. I will renounce ever knowing him beyond your retellings of the war. What will soon become my memories, as well. I will know him as an enemy, and nothing more, but I cannot know him as anything if you snuff his spark."

Optimus' gaze hardened. "You should have never known him. Period."

"I have sinned." Hot Rod's glossa burned from that word. To call Megatron's love sin... He no longer deserved him, even if he survived this encounter. "Let me repent."

"You can repent once he's dealt with."

"Optimus," Hot Rod forced calmness into his voice. "What lesson can I possibly learn if you remove the object of my desire, rather than have me learn to deny him?"

Optimus turned to Megatron, disgust clear on his face, when Megatron's field engulfed him so it may reach Hot Rod. Love, sorrow, and despair found their way even into Hot Rod's spark; an open channel for whatever Megatron sought to give him. Conjunx endurae shared all. Good, and bad.

Hot Rod shut his optics once more, forcing his field to push back against these feelings even harder. He sent nothing out beyond the grief of Drift's passing. That feeling could not be reasoned with.

"I deny him even now, my Prime," Hot Rod continued. "And I will continue to deny him so that I will not sin again. He could be my greatest teacher, if you allow him."

Optimus and Megatron spoke in unison.

Optimus, shouting, "I will not allow it!"

Megatron, determined in spite of his sorrow, "I will not allow it."

Raging blue met desperate red in a familiar lock of optics. Barely a moment passed prior to Optimus resuming his relentless assault that Megatron continued to just barely survive. He had no more strength to send a blow back. The clock ticked down, closer and closer to the end. To when Megatron could no longer defend himself.

In one last ditch effort to protect himself, Megatron removed his scabbard, but Optimus sword split it in two after it deflected only a handful of attacks. His sword cut deep into Megatron's chest, followed by a gush of energon.

Megatron staggered back and fell to his knees, holding the worst of his many wounds while the other leaked rivers of magenta over battered plating. His optics looked up and around, dazed, trying to focus on the hulking shape of Optimus slowly walking towards him.

"You've won!" Hot Rod ran over to try and stall Optimus, but he pushed him out of the way when he stood in his path and shook him off when he grabbed his arm. "What honour is there in slaying a mech at your mercy?"

"None," Optimus said darkly. "I do not seek honour."

Optimus took the remaining steps at a run, bringing his sword down. Megatron lifted his arm to have it take the brunt of the force, though it shook from the effort, and when Optimus pulled his sword back, it fell to his side, limp.

"He can't fight back!" Hot Rod pleaded. "You've won, he can't hurt anyone!"

"And when he recovers?" Optimus bellowed, holding Hot Rod back with the sheer power of his voice. "Who will his tyranny reach next? Are you willing to answer for all of the lives he will take? And what of all the energon that already stains his hands? Why *shouldn't* he die?" He levelled his sword with Megatron's cracked Decepticon symbol, and he was too weak to do anything but stare down the length of it.

Hot Rod watched silently, optics flicking wildly between them as he tried to expand his field and engulf them in calmness, neither of which he was having any luck with. Even with his spark pounding hard enough to hear it in his audials, Hot Rod forced his voice to come out as levelly as he

was able. "Optimus. My Prime, my mentor, if you feel that he is still a threat, then call someone here and place him in handcuffs. Arrest him. Lock him away. Let him explain himself."

"*Explain?*" Optimus' roar compounded upon itself as it echoed around them. "What possible explanation could he have for the *innumerable* murders he has committed?"

"And what about you?" Hot Rod yelled back, regretting the words before they were able to echo back into his audials, but he made himself continue. He refused to cower under Optimus anymore. "Will you answer for every Decepticon that has found themselves at the end of your sword? Will you answer for all of the soldiers you have slain who were just following orders?"

"Orders that *he* gave!"

"So then I can expect you to answer for every Autobot you have sent to their death?" Hot Rod practically screamed this. It reverberated back upon them and then faded to silence as Optimus turned his glare upon his successor.

Hot Rod held his ground and his gaze.

"Enough of this." Optimus turned back to Megatron. "The time for talk, for peace, is long since over. My only regret is letting this continue for this long."

Megatron's optics regarded Optimus with a calm acceptance.

"No!" Hot Rod shrieked as he watched Optimus thrust his sword through armour that had parted to reveal his spark to him just days ago. The spark that flared once and then flickered, just as red optics flickered as they turned Hot Rod's way. His hands pawed weakly at Optimus and the sword, shaking enough for Hot Rod to see even from this distance.

Megatron gasped and wheezed. It looked like he was trying to say something but the sound was choked out by the energon he coughed up.

Hot Rod ran towards him. He didn't think, his limbs just responded to his spark's silent request. It felt like he was in a nightmare. No matter how fast he tried to run, Megatron seemed to get farther away. The distance kept spanning as he watched the blade leave his frame and saw him fall to the floor.

"No!" Hot Rod cried out again as Optimus turned to stop him, holding him firm by the shoulders. "How could you?" He thrashed but couldn't escape his hold. His strength rivalled Megatron's in the worst way.

"You dare betray the Autobots?" Optimus bellowed. "You dare betray *Primus*?"

"Please, I love him!" Hot Rod shrieked, thrashing in his hold. "I will not renounce him, I love him!"

"You will accept the Matrix!" Optimus yelled over Hot Rod's screaming, forcing him further from Megatron.

He still moved. Still ventilated. Hot Rod could still save him. If he could get to him!

"No!" Hot Rod kicked and punched to no avail. "No, I love Megatron! I am no Prime!"

"But you will be," Optimus said darkly. "The Primes will rid you of his corruption." His chest parted to wash them both in the blue light of the Matrix. "Accept it!"

Hot Rod stared, transfixed, at the pulsing crystal that glowed impossibly bright and yet did not hurt his optics no matter how long he stared. He could have sworn he heard whispers at the edges of his consciousness, but he knew it was wishful thinking. Either to finally hear his ancestors, or the more desperate hope that Megatron's voice could still reach him.

"Open your chest," Optimus said quietly, but it found Hot Rod's audials as a booming demand.

Hot Rod shook his helm to break himself from the Matrix's hold. "No! I will not!"

"That was not a request, Hot Rod." Optimus squared Hot Rod's shoulders and loomed over him to bring their chests closer together. "It is time to accept your fate."

"Call a medic," Hot Rod whispered as his resolve drained. "Save Megatron. Once he is, once he's stable, I will, I-I will accept the Matrix. I will not fight you. I will become Prime. But only once I know he will live."

"No..." Hot Rod thought he heard Megatron, but without being able to see him, he left it to yet more wishful thinking.

"This is not negotiable." Optimus glared coldly as he placed his fingertips along the seam of Hot Rod's chest and pressed--*hard*.

"Ngh!" Hot Rod pulled at his wrist to no avail, wincing as his fingers pressed harder.

"Open your chest."

Hot Rod shook his helm, shutting his optics and gritting his denta.

"*Open it!*"

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

I'm completely finished the rough draft so I've updated the amount of chapters. It's technically only 23 chapters BUT I wrote a little extra scene and an epilogue as well.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Hot Rod gasped when his chest parted to relieve the pressure, and Optimus' digits brushed his spark and brought forth a shower of sparks that he didn't have time to react to as the much more painful pull of the Matrix found his virgin spark. He tried to close his chest, but the Matrix had him. He found himself transfixed as he watched it slowly leave a shuddering Optimus, his helm thrown back as he groaned from the oddest pain-pleasure feeling Hot Rod had ever experienced.

It found his frame with a searing heat that burned so hot it felt cold, and sent a bolt through his spark that crackled out through his limbs. He convulsed as though he had overloaded, but though there was a moment of relief, it was overlaid with pain that consumed him and had his mouth opening silently as his optics flared white.

The Matrix dug into Hot Rod's code and rewrote and deleted as it pleased. It stretched his wires taut until they threatened to snap as his plating and struts expanded, and the pain became so great that he hoped he would offline, but he never did. This must be his suffering, though Hot Rod never imagined it would be so great. Of all the things Optimus had warned him about, the upgrade to his frame hadn't even made the list. It was more a side-effect said in passing.

Even with the Matrix within him, Primus still rejected him. It would tear him apart and leave his mangled frame for Optimus to find. The only light still left in him would come from the Matrix.

At the edges of his consciousness, Hot Rod heard Optimus gasping and felt his fingers digging into his shoulders. It all felt so far away, as if he were experiencing it second-hand. Much more intimately, he heard garbled screams filled with static.

The Matrix settled in his chest, though his spark burned as the crystal fused with it. He didn't even notice that Optimus had released him until he found himself on the floor, shaking so fiercely his plating hurt where it rattled against the floor. Over it all, the chaotic voices--at least, he thought they were voices; he couldn't make out any words--filled his audials.

Somehow he'd survived. His frame still ached and pulled nigh unbearably at any movement, however small.

He was vaguely aware of Optimus' hands finding him again, this time to sit him up and lean him against the altar, and even that hurt him, though he had no energy to show it. Even with his fuzzy vision filled with strange, moving shadows, Hot Rod could see Optimus' lips moving as he spoke, but he couldn't hear him over the din. Before he could ask him to repeat himself, if he could even get his voicebox to work, Optimus stood and left his line of sight.

He tried to say something to get him to come back, and maybe he did, but Optimus did not return. He just stared at the empty air.

After a little while he regained a lax control of his helm, and it lolled this way and that, trying to find Optimus, but failing. Had he left? Was he supposed to? None of this had been explained to him.

Was he dying? Primus only accepted worthy sparks, and his burned like nothing else.

"Optimus, what--" A flash of red in his peripheries drew his attention, but when he turned to look he didn't see Optimus. "What is happening?"

The deep timbre of Optimus' voice flowed into his audials, but like the voices, none of it made sense.

He searched around him with his hands, but everything felt off. Fuzzy.

"You will adjust," Optimus said, his voice sounding far off, though he could see his arm now if he turned his helm the right way.

"Optimus?" He found the strength to roll onto his side, slamming a hand down on the floor harder than he had intended to. He pushed, and managed to lift himself just a bit before his arm shook and he fell back down.

"You are stronger than you think." Optimus moved fully into his line of sight. "Try again."

He obeyed his mentor, rolling over again to get on his hands and knees. He tried to remove the cape to take its weight off of his frame, but the knot proved too complicated for his shaky fingers. Instead, he reached for the altar, gripping the edge to pull himself up off the cold floor.

"Arise, Rodimus Prime," Optimus said with pride, as though someone did not lay dying or dead but a few steps behind him. Rodimus prayed for the former as he got to shaky pedes, leaning heavily on the altar.

Rodimus huffed and winced while his clouded optics tried to find Megatron's frame, but he could only make sense of what the light touched, and only Optimus was illuminated.

"Mega... Megatron," Rodimus said.

"Is of no consequence," Optimus said dismissively. "This is a time for prayer and reflection."

"But..." Rodimus shook his helm when the voices tried to overtake him again, and it helped. Moderately. "They are so loud."

"Then listen. If the ancients' voices are deafening, they have something important to tell you."

Rodimus let them in; he didn't fight them, but no matter how much attention he gave them, they made no sense. Just static and screams.

"I don't..." Rodimus covered his audials, but it didn't help to quell them. "I don't understand!"

"You will." Optimus stooped down to retrieve the crown of the Primes. "I, too, was lost and confused in the beginning, but I will be here to aid you in your discovery. I will be your guide, just as Sentinel guided me."

Optimus lifted the crown to place it on Rodimus' helm once more.

"I would like to say my vows now," Rodimus said before the crown could touch him. The chaos gave him pause as he voiced these thoughts. They were still there, still harshly whispering, but they could be disregarded for a short time.

"Has Megatron's corruption damaged your neural net?" Optimus asked. "You have already said your vows."

"My *real* vows," Rodimus clarified. He knocked the crown from Optimus' hands, momentarily surprised at his new strength when it flew across the room. He hid it quickly, hardening his optics as he reached into his subspace, thankfully finding that unchanged, to retrieve his true crown. Megatron's gift. Even with the modifications, it still fit him perfectly.

Despite the tinge of wariness in Optimus' field, he bristled with anger.

"The vows I gave before were not true of spark. They were made to appease you." Rodimus faced the altar, placing both hands on it and glaring at it. "I vow," he turned to face Optimus, "to follow in Megatron's pedesteps. I will not be a tool for *your* agenda! I will be a Prime to Autobot and Decepticon alike, or I will not be a Prime at all!"

"You dare--"

"Do *not* interrupt me!" Rodimus snapped with the force of three mechs. "*I* carry the Matrix now."

Optimus said nothing, but he clenched his fists.

"I understand what we are fighting for," Rodimus continued, his voice and frame shaking. "The lower castes. The *downtrodden*."

"*Hot Rod*--"

"*Rodimus Prime speaks!*" he somehow yelled over his mentor's booming tone. He swore he heard other voices speaking in tandem with him. They added to his power. To the harsh almost white light of his optics and spark. He felt as though he could float. The energon coursing through his veins burned in a way he'd never felt before.

Optimus shrunk until he seemed to be smaller than Rodimus.

"You, who have never known true oppression, fight against those who seek to end it! You do not know of their struggles, and you will never understand!" His voice took on a whisper, next, though it still echoed all around them, as though he were everywhere all at once. "True, I, too, can never truly understand what befell the miners, the industrial workers... I can only listen to their horrific stories of injustice and vow to never let such terrible treatment befall any Cybertronian."

A single scream filled Rodimus' audials, and he whipped around to find Megatron's frame, hoping that he may yet live to scream, but such luck would not befall him. It faded out of existence, and Megatron lay as still as death.

"I will not bend to the Functionist's will," Rodimus continued. "They claim that a bot's form is their function, and yet if that is true, would not every function be equally important? Do we not all need energon to survive? And what cruel irony is there in not providing to those who ensure that we are all provided for? We need miners as equally as we need a leader to ensure that the laws are obeyed. *Real* laws. Ones that protect a bot's rights, rather than suppress them. I am given the highest respect, and yet never will I have to worry of my tank emptying or my frame decaying. There are some who would sooner fell an entire city than see a Prime suffer for even a moment. The same city that would ensure that I am provided for.

"Our world is dying, but it was dying long before the war ravaged our lands. A sickness that infected the very sparks of those assigned to protect Cybertron's people. *They* decided who was worthy. *They* decided that they should be respected and given the best treatment. *They* decided who

was 'unworthy' of 'special treatment.' But what they deemed 'special treatment' was our most basic rights as sentient beings. The right to work. To shelter. To *fuel*, even. How can we continue to put our trust in a system that would choose who lives and who dies simply because of how they were *born*?

"I am Prime. I am Prime, because that is my birthright, or so you have claimed. But had you not taken me from my life in Nyon, I imagine I would fly under Decepticon colours. Fighting for my life. For my brethren. The ones you have spent millennia telling me were the root of all evil. The reason as to why Primus no longer deigns us with new life.

"True, he does not speak to me..." Rodimus shook his helm, twitching, as the voices rose to a crescendo once more, but he forced them back out. "I may not be the rightful heir, but I can see that your time is long since past! You have lead us deeper into the war, just as Megatron has. There is innocent energon on *both* of your hands."

"Rodimus!"

"Shut up, shut up!" Rodimus screamed at Optimus, who stared at him with wide optics, confusion leaking into his field.

"I... did not speak," Optimus said with trepidation.

Rodimus' hands went to either side of his helm, crushing the band of the crown into metal that felt as tender as the fabric cascading down his back. He screamed, joining his agony with the many others' in his mind and spark.

"Rodimus, you are not well."

At the edges of his consciousness, Rodimus heard Optimus speak and felt his hands breach the edges of his field. He convulsed, sending out a harsh charge that bordered on tangibility and forced Optimus back.

"What do you want?" Rodimus begged of the chaos. "Let me help you!"

Conflicting responses overlapped into incomprehensibility. They shouted louder and louder, trying to be heard over one another, until nothing remained but a wall of sound that couldn't be kept out even when Rodimus offlined his audials. Still, his hands covered them, praying that it might help for them to see him in such anguish, but nothing stopped them.

Somehow, through it all, Optimus still managed to put his hands on his frame.

"*BE GONE!*" Rodimus and the ancients became one, channelling their many voices through his tired frame. But though he collapsed from the stress afterwards, the force with which he spoke did have even Optimus fleeing the scene.

The light from the open temple door fell upon Rodimus' spent frame until Optimus shut it and left him with no light beyond the skylight. Even that felt cold. Cold, and yet burning. His frame ricocheted from one end of every spectrum to the other. Even his consciousness came in and out. One moment he was aware of everything, down to the specks of dust floating in the shaft of sunlight, and the next his optics went dark.

A rasping ventilation stilled everything and quieted the chaos. His senses hyper-focused on that single noise until he swore he could taste how it sounded.

Megatron... Megatron!

It felt like he said it, but Rodimus couldn't be sure. He dragged his frame across the floor to the mound ahead, praying that he would find him in repairable health.

Every movement was sluggish. He couldn't tell that he'd moved until a few moments after it had happened. He'd move his right arm only to see his left grip the floor to drag himself further.

"Megatron," Rodimus said, just managing to hear his own voice over the noise that filled his consciousness once more. He shook his helm and managed to banish some of the fog and even found the strength to get to his hands and knees. He could have sworn he heard his own name come back to him, but even if he could be sure that he'd heard it, he wouldn't be able to tell if it was actually him who said it, or one of the many voices trying to get his attention.

He shook his helm again, putting a hand to his chest in the hopes that he could quell the pain and the voices, but all it did was unite the voices for one brief moment.

"*Rodimus*," they said, their combined voices making it sound like a single, booming shout.

"No." He shook his helm. "I am no Prime. I won't..." He choked back a sob. It was too late to refuse. He... he was Rodimus Prime. No amount of refusal or denial could change that.

Rodimus continued to crawl towards Megatron, now able to see the extent of his wounds. He forced his aching limbs to move faster, faster... There was always more floor. More space. Would he ever reach him?

"Just let me save him," Rodimus begged the voices. "Let him yet live. I will accept my title, but only if I know my conjunx will live on."

The voices rose to a crescendo of screams, clearly displeased.

"He will remain my conjunx as Drift will remain my amica!" Rodimus yelled back, glaring at the ceiling as though he'd find his ancestors there. "Oh, god, I remember..." He shut his optics and willed the new pain to leave him. His grief would only compound if he allowed it to consume him then. He repeated, quietly, "Just let me save him."

Finally, Rodimus reached him. Here, where his rasping ventilations grated like sand filled his intake. The sound both gave him hope and knotted his tank until he thought it may never come undone.

He did his best not to lean any weight on him as he rested his hands on his chest and his arm, relief washing over him as dim, but still very much online, red optics met blue.

"I did not mean what I said," Rodimus raced to get the words out. "I-I do not renounce your love, I accept it! You are my conjunx. My wonderful conjunx. I only said that so that Optimus wouldn't..." His voice cracked. "So he wouldn't..."

"My dear, sweet Hot Rod," Megatron rasped, "I am not long for this world."

"Don't say that! I'll get you help, I'll, I'll--" The words abruptly stopped to make way for his quivering lip as Megatron's shaking hand found his cheek. That touch was enough to quiet the voices, if only for a moment. Still, he had to strain his audials past them to hear his conjunx.

"My Prime... My conjunx. There is neither time, nor a medic within these walls who would consider saving my wicked spark."

"You're not wicked," Rodimus whispered, touching his forehelm to Megatron's. "You're not."

"My sun... it is time for me to come face to face with what my life has become. I may be--" He coughed, sending flecks of energon over his chest, and Rodimus couldn't help but flinch at the horrible choking noise. After he stilled, it took a moment for his optics to refocus on Rodimus' face. "I may be judged. I do not know what awaits me, if anything."

Rodimus held his helm as more screams filled his processor. He didn't even notice Megatron's hand touching his, asking him what was wrong.

"You cannot die!" Rodimus yelled over them, bringing his volume down as the voices quieted, too. "I remember you, I, I remember, Drift, I..." He shook his helm as he fell forward onto him, drinking in his scent over the sickly warm smell of energon. "I cannot live with this much pain in my spark."

"The pain will pass," Megatron reassured him. "All grief can be overcome."

"No, I..." He scrunched his optics as they tried to speak to him again. "I can hear them--I can hear the ancients, but, but something is wrong, they--" He grit his dentia until they groaned under the pressure. His processor burned with every garbled word. "They're rejecting me, I don't--"

A sudden wash of calmness extinguished the roar until the voices sizzled, now only whispers from the corners of his processor. As the pain subsided, he opened his optics to see Megatron straining, his field wobbling and threatening to collapse back upon his frame.

"Megatron, stop!" Rodimus urged him. "You haven't the energy to keep this up."

He shook his helm. "My fate is certain, but I refuse to pass knowing that I left you in agony."

"Stop, please," Rodimus begged. "I will be fine."

Megatron's field fizzled out regardless of his choosing, and thankfully the voices kept mostly to themselves. Enough that it did not cause Rodimus further pain.

"See?" Rodimus swallowed around the lump in his throat. "I'm fine."

"I have but one request before I die," Megatron whispered weakly, reaching for Rodimus' hand.

"You're not going to die!"

"Hot Rod... Rodimus..."

Rodimus shook his helm. "I will be Hot Rod to you. Eternally yours, and eternity we will see."

"My sun... Please, indulge me in my final wish."

Rodimus touched his forehelm to Megatron's. He couldn't stop how his frame shook and rattled against Megatron's plating. "Anything."

The screams and incoherent ramblings of the ancients silenced themselves, gracefully allowing these star-crossed lovers a moment of peace.

After the chaos, Megatron's rasping ventilations roared like a seeker's engine. Rodimus still committed the sound to memory. He'd neglected to do so when they had shared a berth, and that would be his biggest regret.

Megatron tugged at his chin, and Rodimus kissed him before he could even ask. Then, just as they parted, Megatron whispered against his lips, "Bond with me."

Chapter End Notes

I hope you guys like this! It was one of my favourite chapters to write.

Chapter 20

"What?" The screams quieted, as if hushed by their love.

"We need not worry if it will kill me." Megatron managed a small smile then. A wobbly one, but it was there. "If it does not work, then I will have passed in a far less cruel way. One borne of love, not hate. If it does--"

"I can save you!" Rodimus snapped his chest open without another thought, but before he could give his spark to Megatron, the static-filled screams found his audials and blinded him to all else. Angry reds filled in his vision, while shadows danced in his peripheries, always just out of reach. He just barely felt a hand on him, and he couldn't tell if it was Megatron's or his own.

Through it all, he heard one word clear as day: *fall*.

Fall. First he would fall, and then Cybertron. Without a Prime nor a leader to follow in this war, their planet would erupt in chaos. Cybertron would burn.

The noise rose to a crescendo and then silenced as the world went dark. The strength and then feeling fled Rodimus' frame and left him numb and empty. He tried to reach for something--anything!--but he could not move. He didn't even feel corporeal anymore.

Was this the Allspark? He prayed, though he knew not if he had processor and spark left for prayer, that he would find something. If he was dead, if his soul had found the Allspark, let him find Drift. Let him reunite and spend eternity at his side. With even more, likely misguided, hope, he prayed for a miracle for Megatron. To give him whatever life Rodimus had left, and let him create the Cybertron he wanted to all those years ago. Let him find him in the afterlife after living his to the fullest.

Primus, Rodimus pleaded with him one last time. Please hear me. I do not need to hear you answer, but I beg of you: give Megatron a second chance. Give Cybertron a second chance. If I must leave this world, let me pass knowing that who and what I love have found peace. Let me know that they have a future. And please... let Optimus see the Megatron he was once friends with. Let him see that he is still there. Let there be peace. Please...

The last of Rodimus' consciousness faded, and even his thoughts silenced.

Nothingness.

No peace, nor war. No life, nor death. No hate, nor love.

And then a speck of light, far in the distance. A light that he could see and feel, however faintly. It approached him slowly, and as it neared he saw the blue in it. Spark blue.

"Drift?" Rodimus felt his voicebox and heard the word it spoke. He reached for the light, and felt his arm move, and through the staticky blackness, he saw his hand, and... something else. A dark mass, quite close to him. In the centre of that mass, was the light, growing steadily brighter, next to a much dimmer, but growing in intensity as well, green light.

"What is...?" Rodimus gasped as his vision gradually returned. He lifted himself up with arms threatening to give out as his optics darted all around, mouth agape. "Is it? Are you?"

In the hole where Optimus' sword had pierced, the light bloomed forever brighter. A blue crystal

that sat beside the green. The green that glowed more brightly as the crystal fed it a new power that had Megatron gasping and arching from the ground.

"Megatron!" Rodimus cried out, holding his helm as his optics flared white, and a moment later, Rodimus' followed.

A light like no other enveloped them. An embrace of white that warmed as much as it gave energy. It coursed through Rodimus' frame like nothing had before. He felt as if he could take on the world. He could vanquish a dozen Unicrons all on his own. Lead with the strength and charisma of a true Prime.

As heroic as Prima.

As stoic as Vector.

As wise as Alpha Trion.

As clever as Micronus.

As intuitive as Alchemist.

As cohesive as Nexus.

As inspiring as Onyx.

As adaptive as Amalgamous.

As ideological as Quintus.

As diplomatic as Liege Maximo.

As unifying as The Arisen. A familiar face among the strangers, though time had changed him.

"Optimus?" Rodimus asked, mystified. Though he received no answer, he felt the truth in his spark.

Their many thoughts and feelings all poured into them as a single stream, and yet it was calm and decipherable. Rodimus could pluck at memories as he pleased, seeing them in an almost crystal clarity. As though he had been there himself.

The forge in his hand, creating, creating, creating... All smiles as he brought something new to life. He helped shape their young world.

The battle against Unicron. Watching his friends fall... a sudden, burning heat through his chest and then nothingness.

"Rodimus..." His name enveloped him; faint, and yet all around him.

Through it all came a strange sort of pleasure as powerful as the pain had been before. Rodimus' whole frame felt lighter than air and yet so full; a wholeness like he had never felt before.

The light faded, and with it the strength, but not so much as to leave him spent, but a slight fatigue still found his limbs as he held his conjunx and he, too, held him. Somewhere in their reminiscing, they had found the strength to sit up and hold each other, chest-to-chest. Their sparks indistinguishable as green melded with blue, and the Matrix found wholeness once more.

He embraced him with no sign that his injury still affected him, like, like...

"My love," that familiar voice found his audials as he pulled back just enough to stroke his face.
"My eternal love."

"Mega..." No. This wasn't possible. It couldn't be, and yet-- "It's you." The name came from deep within his core, and nearly as far back as time itself. "Megatronus! You are alive!"

Megatronus shook his helm as grief and regret joined his elation. He pulled Rodimus back in, almost crushing him. "Solus, my sun... I should not be granted the honour and privilege of gazing upon your visage, nor should I be allowed to touch you, much less hold you. But you must push me away. I cannot bring myself to abstain from you. Not after all this time. Not after I... I lost you..."

Solus. Yes. That had been his name. Back when his spark had first found flame. Back when he had first been granted life. When he had first been granted *love*.

"I would never push you away," Rodimus murmured, putting a hand behind Megatronus' helm to hold it there more firmly. His lips found the plating just beside his pinky and left a kiss there, just as his conjunx began to shake.

"I do not deserve you, nor do I deserve a second chance to fail you."

"Then perhaps we do not get what we deserve," Rodimus murmured. "Perhaps we get what we get, and it is our job to hold onto it if we wish to keep it." The Matrix halves hummed in tandem, feeding their combined sparks with a new life force. "Megatronus, my love... You were on death's doorstep, but Primus saved you. He bestowed upon us a second chance. Will you throw it away without even a pause to wonder why he would do so for someone undeserving?"

Megatronus sighed, the air and half his weight falling upon Rodimus, who held him steady. "I cannot believe I get to hold you in my arms again."

"Nor can I, my love, but I am not about to question it." He ventilated shakily, but happily, against him. "I am simply going to enjoy it."

"I love you more than I could ever express," Megatronus murmured. "I could bring you every star from every galaxy in all the universe, and still it would not be enough. It would not even begin to atone for what I have done to you."

"Hush, my love," Rodimus urged gently. "You are bonded to Rodimus. No longer am I the Prime of creation; I am reborn. As are you, Megatronus. You may share a name, but you are not the same Megatronus from our distant past. You are my conjunx. I seek neither apologies nor grand gestures, but I do seek your companionship and your guidance."

Crystal clear in his audial, Rodimus heard him. He heard the voice of their creator, both then and now. He beamed from audial to audial.

"Only together."

"Only together," Rodimus repeated. "Can you hear him, Megatronus? Can you hear his approval? Our love is blessed." He kissed him when the fear and uncertainty lingered in chaotic red optics. Megatronus melted in his arms, their frames shifting against one another as smoothly as though their corporeal forms had fused as well.

"You feel even more wonderful than I remember," Megatronus whispered, rough lips brushing soft. "I could spend eternity here, bonded to you."

Rodimus closed his optics, touching his forehelm to Megatronus'. His conjunx moved like a mirror,

allowing the calmness to find him. He let it seep deep into his field until they were indistinguishable from one another.

"As could I, my love," Rodimus murmured. The Primes of past raised their voices to be heard, but Rodimus could block them out if he so desired, but he listened. He listened to their warnings, though his thoughts already matched theirs. "I would love nothing more than to stay here with you, but only if I knew that Cybertron would flourish in our absence, but our people need us. Your Decepticons, my Autobots... they need guidance. They need our leadership. We must lead them to a time where all are one. Where they have no use for such divisive titles. Where peace and prosperity are not a far-off hope, but a definite future."

Rodimus slowly opened his optics to find Megatronus' watching him. He stroked his cheek, and red optics shut happily once more.

"Cybertron needs us," Rodimus continued. "I am not ready, but..." He turned his optics heavenward, and for the first time ever, felt Primus' approval wash over him. "... I will be, one day." He turned his attention back to his conjunx. "A day I know will come much sooner with you by my side."

"I..." Megatronus looked from Rodimus to the floor, then he, too, looked to the heavens. "Surely this is a mistake, I... I am not worthy of being a Prime."

"*My child...*" Primus filled their very being. His voice came from all around and deep within their sparks, beating as one. "*Worthiness is earned. I see your potential as I saw it in your youth. If you truly do not feel worthy, then you must find your worthiness through your actions. Repair what you have destroyed.*"

Megatronus blinked blearily as Primus left him on the mortal plane. Rodimus held his helm to keep it from lolling, but soon enough he regained his senses, letting out a shuddering ventilation.

"That will take some getting used to," Megatronus admitted.

Rodimus smiled blissfully, still reveling in the last wisps of this feeling. "All I have ever wanted is to hear his voice. To share such a gift with you, well..." Overcome with another surge of joy, he kissed Megatronus again, finding it cute how he kissed back slowly, still out of it.

"*It is time for The Age of Healing,*" Primus said to them.

Both Megatronus and Rodimus gasped quietly as their creator's voice enveloped them once more. They both shut their optics and groped around until they found each other's hands, intertwining their fingers and holding tight.

"*You both shall lead as Cybertron is rebuilt and the core is restored to its former glory.*"

"The Age of Healing," Megatronus and Rodimus said in unison, mesmerized. They gradually opened their optics, finding the other right where they left them, wobbly smiles on both of their faces.

Rodimus felt Megatronus' mood dip, and before he could self-deprecate, he lifted his chin and murmured, "You will heal just as our planet will. Together we will repair the damage the caste system has wreaked upon you, and all others." He touched his forehelm to Megatron's when he cast his optics down. "Feeling like you do not deserve this will not help anyone, least of all you. You have already chosen peace, but others will still resort to violence. Help them to see the correct path. Repent through action. It is not hopeless, my love, but wallowing in self-loathing only worsens the problem."

Megatronus gave a small smile. "You continue to be my light. Even when the darkness overwhelms me, there you are, shining right into my soul. You amaze me."

"Do not sell yourself short," Rodimus protested. "You have a strength that I cannot fathom. The strength to continue on when all seems lost. The strength to fight against the status quo. You do not accept what is not right; you fight with everything you have to see a better tomorrow. I could not even fight my mentor."

"But you did," Megatronus pointed out. "I heard you. I heard your power."

Rodimus shook his helm. "It was a borrowed power, backed by the ancients, but I hope one day to find such strength inside of myself. With you by my side, I have no doubts that I will find it."

Megatronus cupped Rodimus' helm and pulled him in for a tender kiss. "And with *you* by *my* side, I know that I will come to see the light in the dark."

"We are stronger together," Rodimus murmured.

Megatronus nodded. "Decepticon and Autobot must come together."

"It will not be easy," Rodimus warned, partly saying this for himself.

"But it will be worth it."

Still shaking from the fullness of Primus' light and approval, they kissed and deepened their own bond, each letting the other into the furthest corners of their processors. Unflinching, or at least trying not to, as every memory, good and bad, came to light.

Even the darkest ones deep below the surface found their consciousness. Where Megatronus endured once more his time in the mines, though this time Rodimus was there to help him through the trauma. He held him and kissed him and reminded him through their link that he was not alone, and this part of his life had come to pass.

"You are safe," Rodimus whispered against trembling lips. "You are safe and you survived and you saved yourself and so many others burdened with the same fate. You saved them from a life of misery. These are your roots, Megatronus. Remember why you fought in the first place, and I will help you bloom more healthily, so you can bear witness to a new and brighter age on Cybertron."

Megatronus gripped Rodimus more tightly, burrowing his face into his neck. "Thank you, Primus," he whispered. "For giving me my Solus back, and for my second chance. I will show you that I am worthy. I will do better."

Primus did not acknowledge them, but his essence joined them in their sacred bond, filling them until they felt that they might burst. Light filled their frames and vision. Not a harsh light, but a warm and welcoming light.

In that moment, they felt infinite.

Chapter 21

Their chests were not quite ready to part yet, but sooner or later Optimus was going to come in to fetch Rodimus, so they made a compromise. Megatronus lifted Rodimus in his arms, holding him close. It also had the added bonus of forcing someone to think twice before trying to attack Megatronus.

Megatronus kicked open the temple doors, and though the sunlight fell harshly upon them, their optics stayed locked, unblinking. For all they knew, the world could be falling apart around them.

"You are so beautiful," Megatronus murmured.

A horrified gasp broke the lovers from their trance.

"Megatron?" Optimus clenched his fists. "I thought I had taken care of you."

Neither of them said anything. They just watched Optimus as his gaze dropped from Megatron's face to their open chests.

"The Matrix..." Optimus' optics flicked between them with awe that morphed into anger. "What have you done to the Matrix?!"

Rodimus rested a calm hand on Megatronus' chest just shy of his spark. After a brief forehead touch, Megatronus set him down on his pedes. Their sparks flared as the thin tendrils holding them together snapped and returned to their respective casings.

"We did nothing," Rodimus said, firmly holding his ground. "Primus bestowed upon us each half of the Matrix."

"What?!"

"I am in love with him, Optimus." Rodimus softened his look, hoping to appeal to his mentor's sensibilities. "Megatronus Prime is my conjunx, and my partner in leadership."

"This is unacceptable!" Optimus swung his hand diagonally in a cutting motion. "I will not allow it!"

"You cannot stop it," Rodimus said. "It is done. *We* carry the Matrix. Primus chose *us*." He released Megatronus' hand and put himself between him and Optimus. "And if you want to hurt him again, you will have to go through me first." He shut his chest, just in case Optimus did try something rash, and was relieved to hear Megatron's plating shift to protect his spark, as well.

Optimus shook his helm and glanced up at the sky as though he could not believe his audials. "I see that you have learned nothing."

"I have learned that I cannot bow to your command for another moment!" Though his voice brought strength, Rodimus still shook. "You claim to fight for peace, but you nearly brought death upon our most sacred of places!"

"Hot Rod--"

"*Rodimus*," he corrected. "*Rodimus Prime*. I have finally accepted the name, and you had no trouble calling me such *before* the ceremony!"

Optimus growled, so quiet that only Rodimus just caught it. "You have not seen what Megatron is capable of first-hand. *I have.*"

"Megatronus," Rodimus corrected, again. "His name is Megatronus Prime and I will admit that he is no saint, but neither are you! And I have witnessed your capacity, or lack thereof, for mercy. I watched you attempt to slay Megatronus when he could not fight back. I watched you fight a battle stacked in your favour from the start. I watched you fight him even as I *begged* you not to. And you can lie and tell me that this was a one-time occurrence, but I saw not a shred of remorse in your field as you tried to kill him, *tried*, and you should thank the stars that he is still with us, and then you forced the Matrix upon me. You could have killed us both, and now you stand here and say that Primus' will is unacceptable!" He couldn't help but smirk a bit. "As if you have a choice in the matter."

Optimus clenched his fists. "Primus' will is not absolute."

"Oh, is it not?" Rodimus said sarcastically. "That is strange... because I recall *someone* telling me quite a different story until now."

"I only have your best interests at spark," Optimus said. His words may have been steady, but there was a veiled threat there.

"You--" Rodimus gasped and his optics went unfocused. His vision went fuzzy and then cleared upon a different scene and placed in a different frame. It was all so vivid that he would have thought it to be real, until he saw Optimus' blue hands folded neatly on the table before him. A memory?

Across from him, Ultra Magnus sat in a similar way. He heard his name, or rather "Hot Rod," passed between them as they discussed things, with Drift's name thrown in, as well. For a few moments, he didn't understand, until Optimus said something that had Ultra Magnus nodding in somber approval.

In the present, Rodimus felt Megatronus' hand rest gently on his shoulder as he shared the same memory. But while calmness radiated quickly through Megatronus' field, Rodimus' anger came far more quickly, overtaking them both.

"You lied to me," Rodimus said quietly.

"What did you see?" Optimus asked.

"Drift," Rodimus shook his helm and clenched his denta, "I saw your decision on what to do about him."

Optimus took a cautious step towards him, holding his hands out to him peaceably. "Now, Rodimus, you must understand--"

"Enough!" Even while being a helm shorter than Optimus, he managed to make his voice boom in the same commanding tone used against him, time and again. Enough to even make Optimus take his step back. When he spoke next, though, his voice came out levelly, though thick with hurt. "How could you? How could you look me in the optic and tell me that I would forget Drift? He was *everything* to me!" He ended on a screech undignified for a Prime, but perfect for Hot Rod.

"That was the problem," Optimus attempted to explain. "You went off with him so often you neglected--"

"No!" Rodimus shrieked. "I do not want to hear your excuses!"

A tense silence befell them, broken quickly by Optimus.

"Well, now you are Prime, so you may see him as you please."

Rodimus' clenched denta nearly buckled as he applied more pressure to them. His lip wobbled as he tried to keep his composure, but he ended up with his face buried against Megatronus' chest, while his conjunx stroked his helm and murmured, "It will be okay."

Megatronus lifted his attention from Rodimus to shoot Optimus a well-deserved glare.

"What?"

"Drift is dead," Rodimus said flatly.

"... What?" Optimus sounded equally shocked and scared.

"He's gone because..." Rodimus curled his hands into fists. "If you hadn't..." He turned to face him, though Megatron kept his hands on him. "We were only out there because I wanted to spend one last day with him."

Megatronus anchored his hands on Rodimus' shoulders. "Rodimus--"

"If you hadn't lied to me, Drift would still be alive!" Rodimus accused. He tried to point at him, but Megatronus held him firm.

"Be still, my sun," Megatronus murmured. He encouraged Rodimus to turn back around, and eventually he did, returning to the safety of his arms. "Shh... Blame will not bring him back, no matter how much you wish it will."

"I miss him," Rodimus whispered. "He should be here for this."

"I know." Megatronus stroked his cant spoiler. "He lives on in you."

Optimus' still sickened field intruded upon Rodimus' grieving as he watched them.

"Have some tact, Optimus!" Megatronus held Rodimus' helm more protectively to his frame. "Regardless of how you feel about me, you should care about *his* feelings!"

After another tense pause, Optimus gradually pulled his field back until it no longer touched Rodimus. His disapproval still showed in his optics, though.

"What happened?" Optimus asked.

"Starscream," Megatronus explained. "Fuelled by jealousy, he tried to kill Rodimus, as well, and Drift bravely protected him. He was one of your finest warriors and a gentle soul, and the world is worse off for his absence."

"Deadlock killed many of my Autobots," Optimus countered. "As did you."

"And like Drift, I wish to start over. Make amends." Megatronus held firm when Rodimus began to shake with a bubbling rage. "Would you turn away every Decepticon seeking to find a better path?"

Optimus and Megatronus stared each other down for an uncomfortably long time.

"The war is over, Optimus," Megatronus said. "There will be many Decepticons looking to turn a new page on their life. Will you condemn them before they even have a chance to *try*?"

"One in particular seems too far gone for redemption," Optimus threatened.

"Let me go," Rodimus whispered. His voice had an edge to it.

Megatronus stroked his back. "It is time for peace, my love."

"I do not intend to break that peace." Rodimus lifted his optics to meet Megatron's. "Drift would not have wanted me to."

Megatronus nodded solemnly, releasing him. "He is not worth it," he murmured just before Rodimus turned to face Optimus.

For a long while, Rodimus glared at him. He channelled all the hatred he felt through his optics, so that Optimus may see how *furious* he made him. But... it hurt his memory of Drift, and even after a glare that, were their situations reversed, would have had Rodimus agreeing to whatever he said, Optimus did not back down.

Rodimus sighed. "You never gave Drift a chance. You refused to see him as anything more than Deadlock."

"Be reasonable, Rodimus, he caused nothing but trouble. He so often pulled you away from your responsibilities. I was just trying to make you the best Prime you could be, but half the time you had run off to some bar or out racing while I had to explain to Primus that you took your duties seriously."

Rodimus took comfort and strength from Megatronus' hand on his shoulder, knowing that he would stop him before the idea of hurting Optimus even found his processor.

"If Drift had not convinced me that there was more to life than being a Prime and encouraged me to chase that life, I never would have met Megatronus." He looked back at him then, smiling a little. "At least, not on peaceful terms." Refocusing on Optimus, he continued, "This is Primus' will. He bestowed us both with the Matrix. *This* is his plan. Alone, the Matrix rejected me. The bond was corrupted, because it was not *complete*. If anything, Optimus, you have kept me from my fate." His gaze dropped as more sorrow found his spark. "I will forever be grateful that Drift was there to keep me on the correct path."

"Rodimus, I--"

"I think you have done enough, *Orion*," Megatron said pointedly, putting his arm around Rodimus. "He is Prime now, and I am his protector."

"And I am his," Rodimus added, resting a hand on Megatronus' chest. "He is Prime, too."

"Regardless, Cybertron will not accept a Decepticon as their leader," Optimus said.

"What of the Decepticon population?" Megatronus pointed out. He gave a little chuckle. "They would not follow you, because they would not follow any Autobot. They follow me, because they believe in me."

"And yet you have teamed up with an Autobot."

"I have never felt like an Autobot," Rodimus said. "I still do not."

Optimus pointed to his chest. "You wear our symbol."

"For now." Rodimus took a hold of Megatronus' hand and gripped it tight. "Our world is divided, Optimus. Our factions are a choice, yes, but they have become more than that. They are an integral part of our identities now. To many, to lose their faction would be to lose a part of themselves. We cannot ask our people, still vulnerable from millennia after millennia of war, to simply give that up. At our cores, we are all Cybertronians, but not every Cybertronian is the same. We should celebrate our differences, but we must also show them that Autobot and Decepticon can work together. That is why I will wear my Autobot symbol, and why Megatronus will not abandon his Decepticon brand. We are the first of many unifications." He gave Optimus a long look. "Will you be the second?"

Optimus scoffed. "I cannot believe how he has brainwashed you."

"My mind is clear. I have seen Primus' truth."

Optimus just shook his helm.

"You were The Arisen," Rodimus said. "Look deep into your spark, I know the truth is there."

Optimus narrowed his optics. "What does that have to do with anything?"

Rodimus touched his chest above his Autobot symbol. "Solus." Then, Megatronus' Decepticon symbol. "Megatronus. The first, and now, I suppose, second? Regardless, you knew us in your first life. You must have seen our love then, and it is a similar love now."

"I know that Megatronus murdered Solus." Optimus glared daggers at Megatronus. "Who is to say *he* will not travel down the same path?" He crossed his arms.

Megatronus bowed his helm, shutting his optics and clenching his fists.

"I know he will not," Rodimus murmured, turning fully to face Megatronus and placing his other hand alongside the first one. "I have peered into his spark, into his processor, and I can see the will to change. After all, it is what he sought when the war began. Change. He has lost his way, yes, but he will find his way back. I know he will. And Optimus?" He turned back, keeping a hand on Megatronus while a new ferocity burned through his field. "You, too, have lost your way. The heroic Optimus I knew would never have tried to slay Megatronus--or *anyone*, for that matter--when they could not fight back. And though my memories of him are faint, I know that The Arisen would not be proud of the mech you have become. The Arisen would not deceive the mech he was meant to mentor, and he would not dishonour the dead."

No one said anything for a long while, or perhaps it just felt long.

"Now, if I remember correctly, it will soon be time for Megatronus and I to address our people. And since we have a great deal to explain, we should not dally, yes?" Rodimus watched Optimus calmly. When he said nothing for a long while, he asked, "Are we done here?"

Optimus frowned. "Megatronus will not have the proper attire. It took *weeks* to prepare yours."

"I think you will find that Primus cares less about what a bot is wearing and more about what is in their spark."

"Your people will care," Optimus pointed out.

Rodimus scoffed. "I do not think they will give a damn what he is wearing. I think they will be too busy seeing Megatron alongside their new Prime."

"Yes, there is that, too." Optimus shook his helm, looking to the heavens. "You do not like to make it easy, do you?"

"You only delay the inevitable by delaying us," Rodimus pointed out. "Cybertron will accept their two rightful Primes, or I will die protecting the mech I love." He let his gaze drop to the ground. "I will not have another slain before me."

Megatronus took his hand and squeezed, and he gave him a grateful, but somber, smile.

Optimus let out a great and long sigh that seemed infinite while it was happening. It did find its end, eventually, but they all came out of it a different mech.

"Very well," Optimus said, though his tone said quite the opposite. "Follow me."

Chapter 22

Optimus took them through a ground bridge, hidden inside of a building Rodimus had previously been forbidden to enter. He had to stifle a giggle as he realized that Optimus could no longer forbid him from going where he pleased. Power certainly could corrupt. If left unchecked, Rodimus would allow himself entry to all the best racetracks on Cybertron, only allowing his conjunx to come with him.

A painful reminder that he could not enjoy these new luxuries with Drift pricked at his spark.

Rodimus lifted his optics, dimmed with sadness, as they exited the ground bridge. They brightened as he found himself in shiny Iacon; an Autobot stronghold as untouched by war as the Sanctuary.

"It is beautiful," Megatronus gasped as he beheld it.

"No thanks to you," Optimus spat, continuing towards the grandiose building before them. "Now come, we haven't the time to sightsee. We are already behind schedule."

Like the Sanctuary, Iacon, or at least this sector, had been cleared of all souls beyond Primes of past or present. The tall buildings left them in shadows as they crossed an empty street that Rodimus imagined bustled with life on any other day. He regretted that he hadn't travelled while he was still anonymous to most. Now, he would draw or repel crowds, and neither would give him the true experience of the city,

"You will still have opportunities to explore," Megatronus tried to comfort him.

Rodimus looked at his conjunx, a violated look on his face. He shook his helm. "Sorry. I... will our bond always allow you access to my thoughts?"

"I did not mean to intrude," Megatronus apologized, pressing a kiss to his forehelm as Rodimus heard his conjunx's thoughts, too. Most were routed to further apologies at the privacy violation, while a few others either confirmed his love or voiced his ever-present doubt.

"I guess we are just in each other's processors for the time being," Rodimus said.

"Keep up!" Optimus barked. He was largely ignored.

"I will try to stay out," Megatronus murmured. "Your thoughts are so loud. So troubled."

"I have you." Rodimus hugged him, hindering their progress even further as they had to slow to stay connected. "That is more than I could ever hope for."

Megatronus squeezed his shoulder just a little more tightly, smiling as they followed Optimus into the building. He thought, *I love you*, and Rodimus heard it as clear as if he had spoken it. He closed his optics peacefully and thought, *I love you, too*.

Inside, a small group of stylists awaited them. They gasped fearfully when they saw Megatronus, looking from Optimus to Rodimus then to Megatronus all while glancing around for an exit.

"Be still." Optimus raised a peaceful hand, though displeasure still tinged his tone. "He will not harm you."

"But that's *Megatron*!" one pointed out the obvious, ducking their helm when Megatronus looked at

them.

"There are some... new developments," Optimus explained, an edge to his voice. "Apparently, Rodimus has been seeing Megatron in secret." He gave a growling sigh, and before Rodimus could correct him, he said, "I mean, *Megatronus*."

A few confused whispers started up from the small cluster of bots.

"And *apparently*," Optimus shook his helm a little, crossing his arms, "Primus approves." With a small sigh, he said, "Show them."

Rodimus looked up at Megatronus, giving his hand a small squeeze, then they both bared their sparks and revealed the Matrix halves. The light danced on the surprised and humbled faces of the attendants, whose faces either wrinkled with anger, fear, or a mix of both.

Before any bot could say anything, Optimus cut in, "I understand you may have some mixed feelings about this, but we haven't the time to argue. Primus has spoken, and like it or not, we must accept his choice. The people await their Primes."

One of them looked like they were going to say something, but one innocuous glance from Megatronus had them shutting their mouth before a sound came out. Another walked out without another word, and no one tried to stop them.

Megatronus dropped his gaze. Rodimus squeezed his hand again.

"It is alright," Rodimus said, looking to both Megatronus and their attendants.

"Right." One attendant clapped his hands together. "Rodimus Prime," he nodded his helm in a little bow, "and, Megatronus." He gave his nodding bow to him, as well, but kept his optics on him as he did. "I am afraid we haven't the..."

"Attire, yes." Megatronus nodded, a little solemn. "We believe the public will not care how I am dressed because I am, well, I am who I am."

"Hm. Right." He turned his attention back to Rodimus. "'We.' How quaint."

"Just dress Rodimus," Optimus ordered with an impatient wave of his hand. "I will explain our... situation, to the rest of the entourage." With that said, he left through the front doors.

"This way, Rodimus."

A hand on his back, the attendant ushered him deeper into the building, pulling him away from Megatronus. An unintended squeak of desperation left Rodimus' voicebox as his spark pulled hard in his chest, begging him to return to Megatronus, who held his hand out in his direction. He reached, too, not meaning to halt their progress.

"You two didn't..." The attendant looked between them disbelievingly, though neither of them noticed anything beyond the painful pull on their sparks. "You've bonded. Swell." He sighed. "You come too, Megatron...us."

His pedes were walking before the stylist had finished speaking. He touched his forehelm briefly to Rodimus', retaking his hand.

"Primus, it would be so nice to wake up from this bizarre dream," the attendant said to the ceiling. "Perhaps so I can be up in time to dress Rodimus for his inauguration?"

Rodimus squeezed Megatronus' hand as guilt twisted in his tank. He became so focused on that, before he knew it, he was being whisked off into a shower to be cleaned. It was only once he caught sight of himself in a mirror that he realized how filthy he was.

"There was an... altercation," Megatronus explained to the stylist when he found dried energon on Rodimus' plating. "It's not his," he added quickly.

"Mhm. Because that makes it *so* much better," he grumbled. Nodding to the next shower, he added, "You can start cleaning yourself."

As disgusted as he was, the stylist cleaned him. It felt really good. Like more than just the energon and grime was being wiped from his frame. Perhaps it was just the proximity to Megatronus that made him feel so full of light. Knowing that they could be together. *Truly*.

Though it was strange to have someone just... cleaning him. He'd showered with people before. Drift plenty of times, and Megatronus surely many more times, and while the stylist wasn't *careless* there was a certain intimacy to cleaning someone that they lacked, which made the whole experience awkward. *Especially* when the attendant didn't hesitate to clean his array. Rodimus just swallowed while he cleaned there, and thankfully it was over quickly. All the while he could feel Megatronus' optics on him. Watching him. Protecting him. Ready to jump in and separate them at any moment if he thought their cleaning moved into perverse territory.

After a rinse Rodimus was ushered into an industrial strength drier, and it only took a few moments to blow all the water off. It also felt like it took off half of his plating, but he came out unscathed, if a little shaky. Megatron had no problem with it, going so far as to even look bored as it happened.

Both now squeaky clean, they were ushered into a room lined with chairs and mirrors, where a couple of other bots rushed around, frantic, not even noticing the newcomers. Rodimus felt anxious just watching them.

"Come now, sit!" The attendant tapped a seat. "We haven't the time to gawk!"

Rodimus hurried over, narrowly dodging another stylist who barely came up to his waist. He sat, trying to suppress how flustered he was, but the red in his cheeks and spoiler was unmistakable. Thankfully, he made no comment as he started to run a buffer over his back plating.

"Alright, so, tell me how... *this*," he nodded towards Megatronus, hovering nearby, "happened."

"What?"

"The best part of my job is hearing gossip straight from the Prime's mouth." He smiled. "So get talking."

"Oh. Uh, well..." Rodimus swallowed as he thought back to that night. All thoughts returned to Drift. To his insistence that he go have some fun. How had all this transpired in just a matter of days? He felt eons older.

"As I recall, the most gorgeous mech in all the universe walked down the steps into my mansion," Megatronus cut in. "Until that moment, I had thought 'love at first sight' was but a myth."

Rodimus blushed furiously, his spoiler flapping of its own accord and knocking the stylist's hands out of the way. He threw a quick glare Megatronus' way, but it softened some when he saw how he was looking at Rodimus.

"Well, you two are certainly in love, if nothing else." He sighed. "At this point I'm just glad the war

is ending. Styling our Prime is an honour, of course, but I rarely get to do anything *fun* with it. No one has the time or money for outlandish paint jobs anymore. It's tragic, really. Just make sure you send any new clientele my way."

"Were you Optimus' stylist as well?" Rodimus asked. He had vague memories of crowding around a tiny TV with about fifty other mechs, though he had a distinct memory of the crisp white cape that seemed to fill the entire screen at times. That, and the same crown he had worn just hours before.

He never could have imagined that he would be in the same place thousands of years later. Which brought him back to the memory of the crowd Optimus had spoken before. A similar crowd that awaited him--and that was only the bots *physically* present! Many others would be crowded around TVs just like he had. More, still, would be watching public screenings with ceremonies and celebrations of their own. Perhaps fewer and less extravagant given the war, but... still, many people would be watching him. Judging him.

"I did," he answered.

Rodimus gripped the chair's arms. "What was he like?"

The attendant chuckled. "Nervous. I've never seen a new Prime who wasn't." He mused as he passed the buffer lightly over Rodimus' spoiler. "I think you should always be a little nervous before you speak publicly. Keeps your wits about you."

"I will be with you," Megatronus reminded him. "It gets easier."

"I will be happy to survive *this*," Rodimus swallowed.

"It gets easier," Megatronus repeated.

"You!" the stylist barked at one of the bigger-looking attendants. "Make yourself useful and get to buffing Megatronus."

This was one of the ones who hadn't been at the initial greeting. Their optics widened with fear, but they got right to work without any questions. Their fingers shook as they did. Megatronus looked visibly uncomfortable as he was buffed and waxed, but he endured it.

Soon enough, they both had a sheen to their plating and were ushered over to a full-length mirror. Rodimus almost didn't need it; Megatronus' chest was so shiny he could see his face in it.

"You look so handsome," Rodimus said, moony, as he took in the finished project.

Rodimus turned this way and that to see himself from all angles while Megatronus looked at himself like he was a foreigner in his own plating.

"Something wrong?" Rodimus asked.

Megatronus shook his helm a little and reached out to touch the mirror gingerly. "I am just thinking about how far I have come." He pulled his hand back. "Would the mech down in the mines recognize me?"

"Well..." Rodimus took a hold of his hand, kissing the back of it as it began to shake. "Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe it is a good thing?"

Megatronus' optics did not leave the mirror. "In some ways."

"I know the mech from Nyon would never recognize me," Rodimus murmured. "There are things I have lost, but much that I have gained, as well."

"We are the sums of our experiences," Megatron remarked. "It is just... strange."

Rodimus was about to agree when the stylist returned, arms laden with heavy fabric.

"Your cape." He held it by the collar and let the rest fall to the floor. The first cape had been grand enough, but this one must have been twice as long.

"Oh... I," Rodimus glanced at Megatron. "I am not sure--"

"--if you will be wearing the cape five bots spent weeks making?" the stylist finished for him, raising an optic ridge.

Rodimus said nothing, but turned his back to the stylist to allow him to drape it over his shoulders and spoiler. It was perfectly tailored to rest on it, but not force it to droop, and while the material was heavy, it was dispersed so it did not weigh him down. Lined with an almost shimmering gold silk, he truly felt regal, even if the same Hot Rod blue optics stared back at him.

"I... wow." Rodimus' mouth fell agape as his original attendant and one other smoothed out the length of the cape. Regal, extravagant, even *ethereal* all came to mind as he took in the elaborate stitching and embroidery. Similar to the cape he had worn before, it was a deep red with the same gold thread, but the filigree must have taken *ages* to stitch in. A little regrettably, it clasped to his chest with twin gold Autobot symbols, but he wasn't surprised.

"You are a vision," Megatronus whispered as he kissed at Rodimus' hands.

"Again, I apologize that we have nothing for you, Megatronus," the stylist said as he fiddled with the clasps, working effortlessly around his Primes' affections. "But these things do take time."

Rodimus perked up with an idea. "Do you still have your crown?"

Megatronus rooted around in his subspace, frowning as he found it. Primus may have healed his frame, but not his contents. The band had split in two, and a few of the crystals had cracked or broken off entirely.

"It was a good idea, my sun," Megatronus said, "but perhaps it is for the best that I am not presented as royalty."

Rodimus shook his helm before he could finish speaking. "Nonsense. Primus has named you one of Optimus' successors. You carry half of the Matrix. Regardless of what our people may think of you, you are Megatronus Prime, and none of your past actions may deny you that." He softened his gaze as Megatronus' dropped. He placed a hand over the crown's pieces. "We can fix this, just as we can fix Cybertron. It may not be pretty, and most certainly not at first, but dwelling on its brokenness and who did the breaking will do nothing to make it whole again." He waited until Megatronus looked him in the optics. "Do better. That is how you will make amends."

"You make it sound so easy," Megatronus said, his voice so small it should have come from a bot a quarter his size.

"Make no mistake, your path is a difficult one," Rodimus said sympathetically. "But I will walk it with you. I will help you face your demons at every step of the way. *Only together.*"

Megatronus shook his helm a little, smiling proudly. "And this is the mech who thought he was not

fit to lead."

"Well... perhaps not alone." He smiled at Megatronus, his spark swelling when he was awarded a smile from his conjunx. "You make me want to be a better person. You bring me up when I put myself down."

"I believe that is my line," Megatronus said with a chuckle, stooping to place a kiss on Rodimus' cheek.

"Primus really knows what he's doing, huh?"

"I always thought there was a reason we let him be our god," Megatronus joked.

Rodimus giggled. "Let's see if we can give that crown a quick weld, yeah?"

"I-I might be able to help, uh, to help with that," a meek voice spoke up. When both Primes turned to face him, finding the other stylist who had been fiddling with the cape. "Apologies. I just, um, I overheard, and I," he swallowed, "I am to dress our new Prime, or, Primes." He gave Megatronus a wary glance.

"He looks scary, but he's a big softie," Rodimus assured him.

"R-right. Yes. Well, I think I could fix that? I am quite good with jewelry." He held out a shaking hand.

"By all means." Megatronus handed him the pieces, and he held out a second hand to make sure he had them all. "You really think you can fix it?"

"Not *perfectly*," he admitted quietly.

Megatronus chuckled. "I am sure you can do better than I can. Thank you."

The mech nodded and scurried off.

Megatronus watched him sadly as he left. "Half of our people fear me," he said. He thought for a moment. "More than half."

"Should they not?" Rodimus pointed out. "I was *terrified* when I met you."

Megatronus gave him an almost hurt look.

"Don't give me that look. Your MO for *millennia* was to be feared. I accept that you are willing to change, and I know that I will not be the last, but people *will* fear you, at least at first. Some may never *stop* fearing you. You cannot go out and expect immediate forgiveness, or forgiveness *at all*." He held Megatronus' hand as he shrank under his words. "Look at me, my love. You will always have enemies. No one is liked by everyone, and I am aware that there will be bots who dislike me, as well. You must come to terms with that or you will never find peace."

"How can they accept a leader they *fear*?"

"Primus chose you," Rodimus pointed out. "Chose *us*. Chose *Optimus*, so many years ago. We are chosen for a reason. That does not mean that our people must *like* it. Not everyone approved of Optimus, nor any Prime before him." He chuckled. "Not even the *original* Primes were without fault, as I am sure you are aware."

Megatronus smiled at that.

"Will you use this second chance at life to work towards peace?" Rodimus asked. "Will you work to dismantle the tyrannical regime you built?"

"Of course."

"Then I would say that you are on your way."

A few more stylists fiddled with Rodimus and his cape, never satisfied with where everything fell. Optimus came in to be buffed, too, and he didn't give either of the new Primes a glance. About halfway through Optimus' treatment, the mech returned. He wordlessly handed the crown, now intact, over to Megatronus.

The band looked as though it had never been broken, and though Rodimus could tell that the crystals had been cracked and then glued back on, he doubted it would be visible from far away.

"This is perfect," Megatronus said, smiling. "Thank you."

"It is my duty to the Primes, sir," he responded, his voice shaky.

"Regardless, it is a far better job than I could do in such a short time. You truly know your craft."

He perked up at that. "Thank you, sir. And Rodimus? I have cleaned up your crown, if you wish to wear it." He held out the Crown of the Primes to him. When had they brought that over?

"I would prefer to wear this one," Rodimus said, touching the one still on his head. It was practically *fused* with him at this point, anyways.

The bot bowed slightly. "As you wish."

"It is a little damaged, but it should survive the inauguration. Would you be willing to fix it for me after that? Since you did such a fine job with Megatronus'."

"Of course." He bowed again and then made a hasty exit, but it was clear he wanted nothing more than to sprint out of the room.

"Do you ever get used to that?" Rodimus asked. A moment later, he clarified, "Bots falling over themselves to appease you."

"You get used to how to respond to them," Megatronus said. "And you will get better at telling when their intents are pure, and when they are trying to use you. That bot is genuine. He truly enjoys his job attending to our aesthetics. And why shouldn't he? When they have such a beautiful canvas to work with." He lifted Rodimus' hand to his lips to place a gentle kiss on the back of it.

Rodimus blushed and tried to hide it by putting his crown on. "Well, I know I will never get used to your compliments, nor will I ever stop being amazed at how you can turn any topic into one."

"It is impossible to not tell a beautiful mech how beautiful they are." He smiled as Rodimus' face flushed a deeper pink. "Nor can I stop from telling the same mech how cute he is when he blushes."

"Stooooop," Rodimus begged, covering his face. "I will be a blubbing mess when we go to address the public!"

"Oh, how terrible." Megatronus kissed at his hands between words and gently tried to pry them away from his face. "All of Cybertron seeing you for the wonderful mech that you are? It will be anarchy!"

"Oh my god." Rodimus giggled some more, finally giving in to Megatronus' relentless attack and letting him pepper his heated cheeks with kisses. "How am I going to look fit for leadership if you make me look like a lovesick fool?"

"Once again, you steal my lines." Megatronus touched his forehelm to Rodimus', briefly shutting his optics. "It is as if you can peer into my very processor." He chuckled. "Well, I suppose you *can*, currently."

If they had the time, Rodimus would have let his chest part so he may join with Megatronus again. He did let him gaze upon his spark for a few moments, but he said, "When we are alone again. Perhaps when neither of us are dying."

Megatronus placed his hand over Rodimus' chest once he closed it again. "I would like nothing more than to be one with you again, my sun."

Rodimus beamed, not even caring if the whole world saw him blush. They should see that he was irrevocably in love with him. "I love you."

"I love you, too."

Chapter 23

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

A different attendant lead the two of them down a long tunnel. Above them, Rodimus could hear the many voices and pedesteps of the bots there for *his* inauguration. Would they be outraged? Happy to be witness to such a historic event? Hopefully they wouldn't start a riot. The last thing their planet needed was more violence.

Rodimus subconsciously reached for Megatronus' hand, only to find it shaking almost as much as his own. He squeezed, trying to both take and give comfort, and Megatronus nearly crushed his hand back.

"Only together," Rodimus whispered, again, trying to comfort himself along with Megatronus.

As long as the tunnel felt, eventually it found its end, and they were lead up a small flight of stairs into a little room. The noise from the crowd was even louder here. It compounded on Rodimus' anxiety as attendants fussed with his cape some more and attached microphones to them both.

"Wait here until we come to fetch you," an attendant said, placing them before a set of doors.

Rodimus' face scrunched up in thought.

"What plagues you, my sun?" Megatronus asked.

"I mean, I guess he always could, but... does this mean Primus can watch us frag?" Rodimus looked genuinely concerned as he looked up to Megatronus for answers, but the only answer he could give him was a facepalm. "Don't give me that! It's a valid question! We are the first Primes to have a conjunx."

"Perhaps we will leave such questions to ignorance?" Megatronus suggested, though now he might never be able to keep such a thought from his processor when they interfaced next.

Rodimus pouted a little. "But I wanna know."

"Later, my dear," Megatronus urged, a hint of red on his cheeks. "The public awaits."

Almost as if he had summoned them, a head popped through the door and frantically waved them on. Megatronus took Rodimus' hand as they followed, and though Rodimus had run through this many a time, his processor went blank. Even more so when he caught a glimpse of the crowd. Just one corner, and yet that corner held so many frames that he couldn't even fathom how many more might wait beyond the curtain.

Optimus had been speaking for some time now, but Rodimus only clued in when he heard his name.

"--there was a... complication of sorts," Optimus said. He talked over the confused whispers of the crowd. "He is fine," he assured them. "Primus just had different plans than what we were foretold." He turned to the new Primes, waiting in the wings, nodding and stepping aside from the podium.

Rodimus stayed frozen to the spot, optics wide as he stared at the place where he was meant to be. He was eternally grateful for Megatronus' presence then, because he may never have moved if he

were alone.

Horried gasps and outraged shouts met their audials as he and Megatronus revealed themselves. Rodimus froze again.

"I understand you may be upset!" Optimus boomed, raising his hand for silence. Like magic, they quieted down. At a more reasonable speaking level, but still authoritatively, Optimus continued, "I understand you may be confused. I am not asking you to accept his presence, nor for you to celebrate him, but you must understand that this is Primus' will. I hope you will at least hear your new Primes out."

"*Primes?*" came the confused whispers from the crowd.

Suddenly Optimus was at Rodimus' audial, whispering, "Perhaps you should speak? Vouch for you *conjux?*" The disdain in his voice could have peeled paint.

"Right." Rodimus' ventilations came hard and fast.

A rush of calm bled from the Matrix and filled Rodimus, while Primus' voice could be faintly heard. "*Only together.*"

Rodimus opened optics he hadn't realized he'd closed, and turned to Megatronus, who looked equally calm. He squeezed his hand, managing a small smile, and walked over to the podium.

The crowd had grown so quiet Rodimus' pedesteps echoed. He took the step up to the podium, while Megatronus stood silently beside him.

"It is a great honour to be here today," he began shakily, fueled only by the faint presence of Primus within him. "I would like to--"

"Microphone!" an attendant hissed, tapping the side of his helm.

"Oh, uh," Rodimus switched the microphone on, "Hello?" His voice boomed out over the speakers, and he surely would have collapsed in on himself if Primus and Megatronus were not holding him steady.

Swallowing, Rodimus repeated, "It is a great honour to be here today. I would like to begin by thanking Optimus for his many years of mentorship. Without his guidance, I would not be the mech you see before you today." These words burned his glossa after everything, but after practicing them so much they came easily, and right then he needed whatever he could get.

"Though, perhaps I should get right to what you are all thinking. Yes, this is Megatron. Now, however, he is Megatronus; a Prime in his own right, and my conjux."

The crowd roared with disbelief.

"Primus has willed this!" Rodimus shouted over them, and surprisingly, they silenced themselves as they had with Optimus. "He has bestowed upon each of us a half of the Matrix!" He revealed his half then, sending a shimmering light show over the podium and turning the first row of bots a white-blue. They watched him with awe.

"I understand this is... confusing. Believe me, I am still trying to process all of this, too. It was not long ago that Megatronus came into my life, though it was long ago that he stole my spark for the first time."

He smiled to himself at his clever line. "We stand before you as Rodimus and Megatronus Prime, but this is not the first time our sparks have walked Cybertron. You might be familiar with the story of our past lives. Of the first loves of Cybertronians: Solus, and Megatronus. A tragic story. A cautionary tale. But my subjects, their love was chosen by Primus, and Megatronus, the first one, was tainted by Unicron. We will not fall down the same path, for this is our second chance at love. *Primus has willed it so.*

"Megatronus has shown me his capacity for change. Already he has changed our planet. In some ways, for the better, but still much was for the worse. He seeks redemption, and he seeks it in helping rebuild what he has destroyed.

"Like Optimus said before, he and I do not expect you to fall at his pedes nor accept him until he has proven himself. He has brought harm to many. I will not gloss over these facts, and I know he would not want me to." He turned to Megatronus and found him with his helm bowed, and he made sure to send him a burst of love to keep his chin up. "What you must accept, however, is that Primus has named him Optimus' successor along with me. This cannot be changed. My bond with Primus was incomplete until I bonded with Megatronus, as well."

He paused to let this information sink in. He had fragments of his practiced speech floating around in his mind, but they all sounded like hollow promises in his present. Not to mention that nowhere did he include Megatronus. He was at a loss for words until Megatronus came to his rescue, resting his hand on his spoiler. He gave him a small smile in thanks and then turned back to the crowd.

"'Til all are one,' our kind has said. A promise of an equal future. One where all Cybertronians may be free." Rodimus' voice started off shaky, but the more he spoke, the stronger it got. And every time it shook, Megatronus would make circles with his thumb on his spoiler. Reminding him that, like in all parts of his life from now on, he would not be alone. "Always a far-off hope. A hopeful promise. Always in the future. My subjects..." A loving and joyful look upon Megatronus paused his words. "*Our* subjects, and though you are subjects, you are as royal as we. Royal, but unburdened with leadership. For we speak for you, and rule as Primus dictates for the good of all."

"Today is a joyous one for Rodimus and I, but our bond to the Matrix, bonds us to you all," Megatronus finally spoke, sweeping his arm out and motioning to the many lives laid out before them. "In a way, we have all taken the Oath of the Primes, and in a way, we are all lovers joined. And as I am sure my conjunx, my one true sparkmate, agrees, we see our joining as the joining of all. He an Autobot, and I the patriarch of Decepticons, have proven that any rift that has been made is able to be mended. The war ends here! Decepticons, lay down your arms!"

"And Autobots," Rodimus' voice sounded meek in comparison, but he forced himself to continue, "I will not lead you. Not into battle, at least. I will lead you as the Primes of past have. I will lead in tandem with my conjunx. Together, we will work towards a united Cybertron, just as we, too, have united."

Their Matrix halves hummed to life in their chests, and they opened almost of their own accord. Rodimus and Megatronus turned to each other, spark tendrils reaching out as they rejoined the Matrix before their citizens.

What a bond. What a glorious, wonderful bond.

Megatronus muted his microphone for a moment. "I love you," he whispered.

Rodimus nearly forgot to mute his own, but remembered just in time to say, "I love you, too!" He only just barely kept it as a whisper.

Turning his microphone back on, and turning back to his citizens, he said, "'Til all are one?'" He shook his helm. "No more. Cybertron, it is with great joy that I can announce, that all *are* one!"

He didn't receive the roaring applause that he expected, but it steadily grew from unsure claps into something that stopped making his spark do flips in his chest.

"Or perhaps, all *will* be one," Megatronus offered. "It will take time. There are many burned bridges to be rebuilt, and I will be happy to rebuild the first. Optimus?"

Confusion befell all but Megatronus. Even Rodimus was confused as his conjunx motioned for the former Prime to step forward. He did, though he did so cautiously, as though he expected Megatronus to attack him.

"We were friends once," Megatronus said a little sadly once he stepped within arm's reach. "Many eons ago."

"Many *battles* ago," Optimus said harshly.

Megatronus ignored his bitter words. "I believed back then that we were going to change the world for the better. I still believe that, but it is something we can accomplish only if we work *together*. Appeal to my Decepticons by showing them that violence is not their only answer. Show your Autobots that our differences can be reconciled. Help me end this war, Optimus." He held out a hand in offering.

The audience fell into a tense silence as they watched the two. All optics were glued to the stage or one of the vidscreens. Rodimus feared that Optimus' refusal might start a new chapter of the war. A chapter Rodimus did not want to see written.

"Optimus," Rodimus said quietly. He forgot his microphone was on, and his words were anything but quiet coming out of the speakers. He left it, though. They should hear what he had to say.

"You have always told me that the Autobots fight for peace. That we fight because that is the only choice we have. Well, Megatronus has offered you another choice. He is offering you peace. He is asking for a second chance. He is showing that he has the will and the capacity to change. Is this not what you stand for?"

Rodimus swallowed when he noticed a camera drone hovering just beyond Optimus, fixed on him. He did his best to not look at it directly, especially as he realized that this moment was being broadcast all over Cybertron.

"He is not asking for forgiveness," Rodimus went on. "He is asking for a chance to leave the world better than when he entered it. Is that not what we should all strive to achieve?"

Megatronus held his hand steady, his gaze never wavering from Optimus.

"Turn your microphones off," Optimus hissed.

They did, but Megatronus used his other hand, still holding it out to Optimus.

"What is your angle, Megatronus?" Optimus asked, crossing his arms.

"I truly wish for peace," he answered. "It took fresh optics viewing me and my actions to push me back on the correct path. The path I wished to take all those years ago. Do you think I am too far gone?"

"What kind of question is that?"

"One I hope will garner an honest answer." Megatronus swallowed visibly. "I, too, recall you saying that we all held the capacity for change. I recall you pleading to have me reconsider."

"*Many* years ago."

"I am aware." He reached forward just a little closer to Optimus. "If you believe I am too far gone for redemption, I will accept that, but only if you can pinpoint exactly where in my life I took that step too far."

"I cannot just pinpoint that!" Optimus argued.

Staring at him levelly, Megatronus said, "Perhaps that is because you still believe there is hope for even me."

When neither of them said anything for an uncomfortably long time, Rodimus cut in. "Optimus, ask yourself this: a million years from now, when this is nothing but a far-off memory, which side of history do you wish to be on? The side of progress? Or the side that clung to the war, no matter how pointless it has proven to be?"

The audience grew restless, whispering amongst themselves.

"The longer we talk, the more they will assume," Megatronus pointed out. "As Rodimus said, I do not seek your forgiveness. I know I am beyond that. I know Megatron will not be forgotten, but I will do everything I can to make Megatronus the mech that Cybertron *needs*."

With a growled sigh, Optimus flipped his microphone back on and gave Megatronus' hand a firm shake.

"I look forward to working with you to rebuild our planet," Megatronus said after turning his microphone back on.

"I hope that I will see more of the mech you were before the war," Optimus said. "I believed in that mech, and I know many who follow you saw that in you, too."

Rodimus turned back to the crowd. "Let this be the first of many reconciliations!" he announced. He felt the Matrix humming with life, backing his voice with the strength of all Primes past. "Look to the Decepticons not as your enemies, but as future friends. Look past their faction to the spark inside. I am confident that you will find more similarities than differences, but this cannot be if one does not take the first step towards peace.

"This will be a long road. Long, and arduous. Some days you may think it easier to pick up a sword and resume the war, but you must fight that instinct. Our world--" he gestured all around them, "--is dying. Every day our energon deposits shrink, and there have not been any new deposits found since early in the war. It is easy to point fingers elsewhere. For Autobots to blame Decepticons and Decepticons to blame Autobots, but we have all shared a part in the destruction of our home, which is why we must all share in the *rebuilding* of our home."

Megatronus rested a hand on Rodimus' shoulder. "I will be the first to pick up a hammer," he told the audience. "Much of my home, Tarn, was lost in the early days of the war. It was never a shining city, quite the opposite, but I would like to see it rise from the ashes. I, like many of you, would like to return home."

"One mech is not enough to rebuild a planet." Rodimus leaned into Megatronus' touch. "Primus told us when we received the Matrix that *only together*," he let those words hang in the air until his voiced finished echoing, "can we accomplish what we are setting out to do. Join together as Primus

has joined us."

Rodimus turned towards Megatronus, his gaze dropping to his lips. They both felt the same strange pull in their sparks, and neither were strong enough to resist. Megatronus stooped down while Rodimus lifted onto the fore of his pedes, joining in a chaste kiss that was met with equal disgust and awe. As they kissed before their citizens, their chests opened of their own accord and bared both their sparks and the Matrix halves, glowing more brightly than even the sun. They parted slowly, optics dropping to the display that called to all in witness.

"Only together..." Rodimus said dreamily.

"Only together," Megatron agreed, his hand coming up to cup Rodimus' cheek as they joined in another kiss that had the Matrix glowing to life once more.

Chapter End Notes

So this is the "end" of the story. There's still a little extra bonus scene and an epilogue, but otherwise it's done. I hope you all enjoyed it! I certainly had fun writing it.

Extra Scene

Chapter Notes

Because I thought, "hey, they didn't fuck enough in this" so here's a little extra bonus scene. The epilogue comes next week!

"Oh, Megatronus..." Rodimus reached behind him, groping through the air until he found Megatronus' helm, buried in his neck as he ravished him with kisses. He circled his hips, thoroughly enjoying his frame upgrades. As well as Megatronus' frame fitting against his like two lost puzzle pieces coming together.

Megatronus stroked at Rodimus' chest seam; a request he did not have to voice. A moment later, his fingers brushed at Rodimus' naked spark.

"Oh, Primus," Rodimus whispered.

"Careful," Megatronus warned teasingly, a smile against Rodimus' neck, "he might think you're trying to pray to him."

"Let him watch." Rodimus smiled in spite of the twinge of fear of that becoming reality.

Megatronus chuckled, tracing along Rodimus' spark casing. "My Prime is a bit voyeuristic, is he?" His other hand found Rodimus' anterior node. He rubbed it, but kept his touch teasingly light. "I imagine some bots would pay an arm and a leg to watch us make love."

"Mmm..." Rodimus turned his helm until he caught Megatronus' gaze. "We could film it and pass it off as imitation porn." He laughed a little as Megatronus cupped his face to pull him in for an awkward but pleasant kiss. He, too, chuckled.

"I think I would rather have you all to myself," Megatronus murmured.

"Me too." Rodimus moved Megatronus' hand back over his spark. "Besides, the Matrix halves might tip them off."

Megatronus sighed happily as he returned to the crook of Rodimus' neck. He toyed more incessantly with Rodimus' spark until tendrils pulled at his fingers and encouraged him to delve deeper. He did just that, groaning in tandem with his conjunx as the feeling found both their sparks.

"I must have you again," Megatronus said. "My sun, will you bond with me?"

In way of answer, Rodimus slipped from Megatronus' arms and lay back on the berth, holding his arms out in offering. "Come to me, my love. Let us be one once more."

Rodimus spread his legs further as Megatronus sheathed his spike inside of Rodimus once again, kissing him deeply as he parted his own chest plates. Their sparks joined as easily and as deeply as lovers reunited, and for a few brief moments, they relived a similar moment from their very distant past, where their sparks had first joined as one.

"After all this time, you still feel like coming home." Megatronus' hands roamed the sheets until he

found Rodimus', and then he held on tightly. "I cannot wait to spend the rest of my life with you."

Rodimus' spark surged and brought them both to a soft and blissful overload. It felt as though their sparks expanded to envelop them in light and warmth; a brief, peaceful bubble to shelter them from their war-torn planet. Even Primes needed a reprieve, sometimes.

"I love you so much," Megatronus whispered, his voice still light from the tingles that made his frame feel fizzy.

"Mmm..." Rodimus pulled Megatronus' helm down so they could rejoin in a gentle kiss until their overload left them high and satiated. "I love you too."

Megatronus continued to lazily thrust into Rodimus while they shared memories, old and new. They shared a laugh as Rodimus paused to consider their predecessor, though still a far off happening. Optimus' memory had been so vivid; would they be able to see them interface with such clarity?

"Would you rather we did not?" Megatronus asked, smiling as he stroked Rodimus' cheek.

Rodimus shook his helm.

"Then let it not trouble you."

"I mean, it doesn't." Rodimus shrugged. "Honestly, I think it would be kind of funny. We would be trying to guide them in the right direction, and suddenly they are seeing the two of us rutting away."

Megatronus rolled his optics before he nuzzled into Rodimus' neck. "What an amusing picture you paint, my dear."

"Hey, these are *valid concerns*!"

"I think it will be far more amusing if they see us discussing the potential for them to see us while we are interfacing, *while we are interfacing*." Megatronus shook his helm and chuckled, then kissed along cables to clear Rodimus' mind of further thoughts down this route. "But if they do see us, I hope they see that we are truly in love. I hope that they see how precious you are to me. That you mean the world to me. That I would fight a million wars just to see you safe and happy."

"Megatronus..." Rodimus accepted his offering for a kiss. "Let us end this war for good, instead. If you love me, see that no new hate is brought into this world."

"Of course, my sun." Megatronus kissed him again and then rested his forehelm on Rodimus'.

"Every day you humble me. Every day you keep my pedes on the right path."

"Only together," Rodimus reminded him.

"Only together," Megatronus echoed.

Epilogue

Chapter Summary

One year later

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

They became known as "The Healing Eclipse", and every mention by that name had Rodimus shying away with embarrassment. He felt undeserving of such a name; they had done so little. Their journey was far from over.

Megatronus, on the other hand, while he didn't exactly *welcome* his new title, he didn't reject it, either. He had vowed to allow their subjects to judge him as they saw fit, even if that meant that they thought he should be put on trial and potentially sentenced to death. While there had been small groups who doubted the word of Primus and called for his head, they never made much headway. Not that Rodimus would ever allow anyone to take his beloved from him. They couldn't. He carried half of the Matrix. Which was likely why the resistance had been so small.

But this... this was a bit much.

"I look ridiculous," Rodimus said once he saw the whole ensemble before the mirror. On their own, the pieces hadn't looked too outrageous, but all together... he looked like he was on fire, and not in the good way. Around his helm, a halo. Meant to represent the sun. It was so covered in glitter that, under the bright lights, it looked like it emitted its own light.

"You are our Sun," Rodimus' stylist said with awe.

"But I am not *literally* the Sun, it is just..." Rodimus growled out a sigh and rolled his optics. He got up from the chair, shaking his helm. "There is no way I can stand before our people looking like *this*." He gestured to it all. The shimmering gold around his face kept catching his optic and making him do a double take. Oh, what a joy it would be to do that before an *audience*.

Despite his complaints, he allowed his stylist to usher him over to the full length mirror, inspecting and fixing minor imperfections, as though he couldn't see how foolish he looked. Over time he'd found it was easier to just let them do what they wanted with him, but... this was something else.

"I think you look beautiful, as always," Megatronus said as he walked out of his own dressing room.

Rodimus took one look at his conjunx and burst into uncontrollable, gut-holding laughter. He doubled over, banging his fist on the nearby vanity table, laughing until no sound came forth and he ran out of air. Though he was somehow able to laugh more when Megatronus moved his helm and the two moons attached to it jiggled comically.

The cape on its own might not have been so bad. A pitch fabric dotted with tiny jewels that glimmered like stars, but paired with all the little spikes glued to Megatron's frame to make him look like the moon--and the *helmpiece*--it all made for a cobbled together *mess*. *Two* messes.

"Nope. No. Nuh-uh. We look bad enough on our own, but *together*?" Rodimus shook his helm,

smiling wide as giggles still found his frame. "We will get laughed off the stage before we can even get one word out."

"This is a special occasion," Megatronus tried to reason with him. "Our people will expect us to be wearing the proper attire."

"How is this 'proper attire?'" Rodimus held still as his stylist came over with gold paint, drawing lines onto his arms and just adding to the garish and cluttered look.

"We are dressed as Solarion and Lunares, created by Primus to give us the night and the day. It is what our people expect of us."

"What, do they think we're *gods*?"

Megatronus half-shrugged. "Well..."

"Okay. Nope, no, I'm not doing this." Rodimus walked away from the mirror, forcing his stylist to pull away the brush before he made an errant line of gold on his arm. Then he growled in frustration as Rodimus wiped at the make-up, smearing gold all over his arm and hand. "Frag it all..."

"Rodimus," Megatron pursued him as he went deeper into the building, heading for the washracks, "Rodimus, wait."

"We are already the reincarnations of two of the original Primes. That is the truth. I will not live this lie." No matter what he did, the paint just spread. His whole frame was going to glimmer at this rate.

"This is what our people want."

"Is it?" Rodimus whipped around. "Or are they just trying to erase who *you* are?"

Megatronus' face fell.

"I am not trying to make you feel bad or bring up the past, but... this all feels as if the media wants to sweep the war under the rug and pretend it never happened. They jump at any chance to rebrand you as anything other than the mech who fought against our oppressive Senate and the *still-present* Functionists! We are wasting our time getting prettied up for an audience when we *should* be spending this time trying to dismantle the very thing you started the war over!" As much as he wanted to comfort Megatronus, he wanted to be clean more. He continued on his way to the washracks, leaving a trail of shiny accessories in his wake.

Under the cool stream of water, Rodimus shut his optics, knowing that the gold covering his frame was spiralling down the drain. He tore the last piece, the halo around his face, and tossed it away, delighting as it took on water. Then he put his face right under the stream even as it turned scalding. He'd rather feel the burning on his face and know the paint was washing away than let it distract from his words.

"Rodimus." Megatronus announced his presence, and shortly after his hand was curling around his arm, gently pulling him out of the stream.

"You know I am right," Rodimus said, avoiding his gaze. "I know you are just trying to do what everyone wants you to do, but you are being unfaithful to the mech you used to be." He swallowed as he forced himself to look him in the optic. "You can be peaceful while still fighting for change."

"It is just for publicity," Megatronus said. "I realize it is not the most *dignified* part of our jobs, but--"

"But *nothing*. What we are wearing will make every headline, and then the tiny articles about the rolling blackouts in Tarn will go unnoticed! If there even *are* pieces done on that." He looked Megatronus right in the optic. "Surely you care about your home town? Not to mention that without power we will have to worry about possible energy shortages. We should be doing something about *that*, not.... not *this*." He gestured to their reflection.

Megatronus looked at himself for a good long while. "Of course I am worried, Rodimus."

"Then act like it!"

"I am just trying to do what is expected of me."

"Who *are* you?" Rodimus shook his hand off. "This is not you. If it was, you would still be down in the mines."

Megatronus' optics dimmed to a near-black.

"My love..." Rodimus framed where his spark chamber was. "What happened to the mech who fought against all that was wrong with our world? The mech who would not stop at *anything* to see his plans seen through. The one who *promised* to make Cybertron a better place for *all*?"

He said nothing, avoiding Rodimus' gaze.

"*Look at me.*"

He didn't.

"So you're just going to be *passive*?" The word left a foul taste in Rodimus' mouth. "You're just going to sit back and hope everything fixes itself?"

"I worry, Rodimus," Megatronus admitted. His words all came out in a rush. "I worry that a Decepticon hides in the shadows, waiting to retake my frame."

"That's scrap."

"But--"

"No. There isn't some 'inner demon' that did all those horrible things. *You* did them. You are one with the evil inside of you, but you have to *choose to do good*. You think I do not have selfish thoughts? Do you not think that sometimes I just want to do whatever everyone wants me to?" Rodimus scoffed. "The only difference between you and I is that you have followed that train of dark thoughts. You have to *choose* not to. Every day. Every *moment*. If you do not want to be a Decepticon again, if you do not want to turn to violence, you have to *choose* not to every time the opportunity arises. Got it?"

Megatronus dimmed his optics again.

"Stop that. Stop trying to make me *pity* you. Hell, you having a little regret seems like a *good* thing to me. Worrying is a help not a hindrance, if it makes you stop and think about what the frag you're doing." Rodimus put his hands on his hips.

"Tarn was the first city I conquered."

"So? Does that mean a mainly-Decepticon population deserves to suffer?"

"No, but--"

"But *what*?" Rodimus got up onto the fore of his pedes to force Megatronus to look at him.

Megatronus sighed. "Do you not think it will look suspicious if I focus my efforts there?"

"So, if I am hearing this correctly, you are going to deny those in need help because of how it may affect *your* social standing?"

The Matrix burned in Rodimus' chest. Did Megatronus' feel the same?

"I would like to get my conjunx back," Rodimus said when Megatronus stayed silent. "You know, the one I have bonded with and have his back in every decision made for the good of his people?"

Finally, Megatronus looked at him.

"Stop looking so sad."

"Forgive me if I find it difficult to smile."

"I did not *ask* you to smile." Rodimus ghosted his hands up Megatronus' chest and settled on his shoulders. "But I do have your back. Always. If anyone accuses you of catering to your own interests, I will defend you. And they probably will. We cannot appease everyone, and yes, some bots will scrutinize your every move, but my dear, there will be others who criticize your doing *nothing* to help those in Tarn. Which would you rather explain yourself to? Those angered by your charity or your ignorance?"

With a solemn face, Megatronus nodded. "Once again, you are right. I have been a fool."

"At least you are a handsome fool." Rodimus smiled flirtatiously and wrapped his arms around Megatronus' neck. While he had intended a kiss, his conjunx sought to touch their forehelms together in a different sort of kiss. It was still nice. Until Rodimus felt the baubles hitting his finials.

Rodimus snorted with laughter. "*Please* take those off." He pointed to Luna 1 and 2 bobbing atop his helm. "I cannot take you seriously like this!"

"What, these?" Megatronus waved them in his face. "What isn't dignified about wearing miniature models of our moons?"

Through his laughter, Rodimus found the band holding them on and threw them away. Before Megatronus could pull away, though, he murmured, "Since you're here already," and kissed him.

"I feel like you are trying to get me to make a bad decision," Megatronus purred, pulling Rodimus in by his waist and kissing him again.

"Who, me?" Rodimus wrapped his arms around Megatronus' neck. "I just wanted one kiss. You're the one who's keeping me here."

"Mm..." Megatronus lingered, his next kiss hungrier than those prior. He even managed to pull a quiet moan from Rodimus. Pulling away with a small gasp, he murmured, "I do not see you trying to escape."

"Blaming the victim, I see," Rodimus teased, enjoying the tickle of Megatronus' chuckle as his lips found home once again.

Megatronus brought his hand up to Rodimus' face and stroked his cheek as he pulled away once more. "We really should go back. Our people await us."

"So we sneak out the back way and onto the stage before our stylists can get to us again. As long as we show up, no one can get mad at us."

"They will still expect us to look our best."

"Hmph. Fine." Rodimus took a step away from his conjunx and dug into his subspace, retrieving the crown gifted to him by Megatronus and a little tub of gold paint and a small brush. "But I want you to paint me. I don't want to be touched anymore, except by you."

Megatronus accepted the paint and brush, sighing as he met Rodimus' gaze. "I cannot sway you?"

Rodimus shook his helm.

"Very well." He gestured to a stool in the corner. "As my Prime commands."

Just like that the first night of their journey to love, Megatronus painted him. Gone were the jittery nerves and lustful touches, but the warmth remained. It radiated out from twin sparks yearning to join again, as they always did. And like the night they became conjunx, they bore their crowns; a benevolent rule. Not one of luxury and costumes, but one that would leave Cybertron better than they found it. A Cybertron they could be proud to pass on to the next Prime when their goals were fulfilled.

"There is my Hot Rod," Megatronus murmured. "As radiant as ever, and as feisty as ever." He chuckled. "Feisty in a good way. Never straying from the path he knows to be right."

"A path much more easily tread with someone I love at my side." Rodimus placed the crown on his helm. "Now, let's get the rest of this ridiculous junk off of you."

Once Megatronus had shed his garb, Rodimus rested his hand over the cover for his subspace. "And you? Do you still have your crown?" He put fingers to the latch, waiting for Megatronus' nod that it was okay, and then reached in to find the crown. The brilliant stylist from their first appearance, who they had repeatedly asked for and been denied, had restored it to its former glory. Rodimus would argue that it was even *better* now. He silently vowed to find this mech after the ceremony and make sure he was as employed as a mech of his talent should be. They were Primes, what was stopping them from appointing him as their official stylist?

"Do you have any recollection of when Optimus came to be Prime?" Rodimus mused, admiring his handiwork. Why hadn't he bothered to learn his *name*?

"Some."

"How much do you remember?"

Megatronus shrugged. "I mostly remember how betrayed I felt. How he steered his work away from the ideals he had proclaimed to have. I cut ties with him soon after his inauguration."

"Do you know of Sentinel's role at all? Particularly when he backed the fuck off?"

Megatronus chuckled. "You still have much to learn, my Sun."

"Then *you* teach me."

"What do I know of being a Prime? I am as much a student as you." He bowed as Rodimus placed the crown on his helm. "I am sure Optimus still has much to teach us."

"But you have a million years worth of experience as a leader! What could Optimus possibly teach you?"

Megatronus kissed the backs of Rodimus' hands, releasing one but holding onto the other. "The spiritual side is still uncharted territory to me. In my youth, before the rift, I tried to believe in Primus. I tried to believe in the divine purpose I was told he had for us all, but all communication can be cut off in the mines, even that of Primus. I lost faith. I believed that if he truly loved us, then he would save us, and when he didn't, I knew that I had to do it myself. I find it difficult to call on him now, but Optimus is clearly well-versed in this. I am sure that you are still struggling with your feelings with Primus, yes?"

"... Maybe a little, but we don't need Optimus ventilating down our necks at every step!"

"Perhaps you are right, my Sun, but I think you should use whatever resources you can. If nothing else, Optimus will be a lesson in what *not* to do, but I do not think he is all bad. Misguided, most definitely, but so was I." Megatronus smiled. "And perhaps, like me, Optimus has something that he must learn from *you*."

Rodimus considered his words while staring at their joined hands.

"We really should get back, my love," Megatronus murmured, gently tugging him back in the direction of the dressing rooms. Rodimus allowed himself to be lead, wondering how the hell every other Prime had done this alone.

"What do you mean they're not here?" Optimus bellowed loudly enough for them to hear him, even down the hallway.

"Looking for us?" Megatronus asked once they came through the doorway.

Optimus looked them up and down, horror dawning on his face. "Why are you not dressed yet? You go on stage in ten minutes!"

"I refuse to dress-up and deceive my people, Optimus," Rodimus spoke up. "We are not immortal, and we are not without fault. We are as Cybertronian as any one of them. I do not wish for them to worship me."

"You are *Primes*," Optimus left that word to hang for a moment, "you are *meant* to be worshipped. You are the vessel for Primus!"

"That was your way," Rodimus held firm. "We may be the vessel, but we are not gods. *Certainly* not long-forgotten celestial gods."

Optimus sighed, crossing his arms. "What does it matter how they see you?"

"It matters to me!" Rodimus put his hands on his hips. "And if it *truly* does not matter how our people see us, then why must we don ridiculous costumes? Should we not put more time into our words?"

"You should put considerable time into *both*," Optimus said. "Your presence is as important as what you have to say."

"We look presentable!" Rodimus argued. "We are clean. I am even painted. What more can you ask of us?"

"Your people expect their Primes to dress as the Primes of past did."

Rodimus rolled his optics. "How can we ever move forward if we are all so focused on the past? Optimus. I want my actions to speak for themselves. I do not wish to cover myself in garish accessories or extravagant capes and crowns that only serve to distract from what I am trying to do. Already the media has reported on several speeches we have put forward, and at least *half* of their 'news' stories involve commenting on what we are wearing. I will not spit on tradition when tradition calls for religious wear, but there is no reason for any of this."

Optimus crossed his arms. "It is what is expected of you."

Rodimus growled with frustration, but one look at Megatronus helped to calm him and remember that he *also* had someone at his back. Someone loyal. Someone set on the same path. Someone who loved him.

"Optimus." Rodimus let his name hang in the air. "I respect you as my mentor, as my advisor, but I need a better explanation than how this is just 'what is expected.' None of us, including myself, ever thought that there would be two reigning Primes. Nor could any of us have expected the second Prime to be *Megatron*. But Primus chose this. Chose us. He moved us beyond our expectations, and I would like to think much of his reasoning was to open our processors to new possibilities. So, no, I will not do things simply because that is the way they have always been done. I will do what works, and I will do what can be reasonably explained. I will do what is best for our people, and I know in my spark that we must stop the media from focusing on our outward appearance. And after this, Megatronus and I will be heading to Tarn."

Optimus turned his attention to Megatronus. "Perhaps *you* can talk some sense into your conjunx?"

If it weren't for the unyielding hand on Rodimus' shoulder, he might have attacked Optimus.

"Rodimus has more sense than the both of us combined, old friend." Megatronus stared at him levelly, though beneath the calm was a storm waiting to be unleashed if Optimus continued to undermine him. When Optimus did nothing but subtly glare back, he added, "Besides, we are due on stage momentarily. We have not the time for arguing nor styling."

"If someone had not *run off*—"

"A good mentor knows when his pupil no longer needs his teachings," Megatronus cut him off. He gave Rodimus' shoulder a reassuring squeeze. "He should also allow his pupil to make mistakes, if he ever hopes for him to learn from them. A good mentor will also realize that he is not infallible, and perhaps *he* has some things to learn from those younger than him."

"*Two minutes!*" the very panicked stage manager called back to them.

Rodimus shrugged off Megatronus' hand. "Looks like we have to get going."

"It would seem that way," Optimus answered carefully.

Rodimus and Megatronus passed Optimus on their way to the stage, but Rodimus stopped just past him. He could feel his optics on his back, so he knew he was listening when he asked, "Optimus, how many times did Sentinel tell you 'no?' How many times did he question your wisdom?"

"Constantly."

"And you *never* stood up to him?" Rodimus turned to face him. "Not even once?"

Optimus sighed, "We can talk about this later."

“Just answer the question.”

Shaking his helm, Optimus said, “I did, at first. I wanted to be different than him. But I assumed he knew what was best for me in the end.”

“So you became him?”

“*ONE MINUTE!*” The stage manager looked about ready to grab the both of them and *throw* them onstage.

“Now is not the time, Rodimus,” Optimus dismissed him again.

“Hmph. Fine. But know that I am not you, Optimus. I do not give in so easily.” That said, Rodimus held Megatronus’ hand and allowed the fritzling stage manager to lead them.

Rodimus took to the podium first while Megatronus stood a little ways off. Nervousness still flooded his systems as they did before every speech or public appearance, but it wasn’t as difficult to make the words come. Especially these ones. He’d practiced them over and over after carefully choosing what to say.

"A year of peace," Rodimus began, "or, perhaps not." He chuckled, and it eased his nervousness some to hear some laughter from the audience. "I will not say it has been an easy year, nor *completely* peaceful, but I would be remiss to not celebrate how far we have come. *All* of us. We have all had a hand in seeing the end of the Great War. From those rebuilding our infrastructure, all the way to those who have let those of a different faction into their life. Out of the ashes, we have found friends, amicas, and conjunx. We have chosen to love, rather than hate.

"Make no mistake, we are nowhere near our goal. We still have much to rebuild and many more bridges to gap. Both physical and metaphorical." He smiled, getting a few more laughs. "After we are done here, Megatronus and I will head to Tarn to help there. I know that you have had to deal with the energon shortages even here, and I thank you for your patience as we resolve this issue. But while you are enjoying your rations, I would like you to think of the labour that went into getting that energon into your hands. Remember that we cannot take manual laborers for granted. Without their valuable labour, Cybertron will fall.

“In lighter news, soon we will not have to worry about energy shortages, as the core is finally producing *new* deposits!” He watched his people rejoice, feeling light at spark. “Yes, it is truly something worth celebrating. I am hesitant to order that they be mined until we have our researchers study their rate of growth and until another deposit begins to grow elsewhere, but it is a sure sign that our planet is truly healing.

"While I am overjoyed, I would like to take a moment to speak of more somber events," Rodimus continued. "We are here to honour our fallen warriors, but there is one in particular I would like to honour. Many of you did not know Drift, or perhaps you knew him as Deadlock, and this lack or excess of knowledge of him may leave you asking, 'why are we honouring him?'" He shut his optics and took a deep ventilation, forgetting that he was still by the microphone and broadcasted a very loud exvent over the crowd. He talked over his growing embarrassment, trying to feed off of Megatronus' calming field. "Drift was very special to me, and I will admit there is much bias to this commemoration, but I stand by my decision. I had spent much of my time with him worried that I would one day forget him," Rodimus' voice took on a bitter tone, "and now that I know that will not come to pass, I would like to make sure that I, and all of Cybertron, will remember him.

"If you must have a more noble reason to honour him, please know that Drift had committed himself to my protection long before I carried the Matrix, or," he chuckled awkwardly, "*half* of the Matrix."

"Shortly before I became Prime, Drift and I had an... altercation with some Decepticons." Some angry murmurs started up from the crowd, and Rodimus spoke louder to drown them out. "Some of them were not happy to learn of my union with Megatronus, and they sought to end my life. Drift, brave Drift, defended me. He died protecting the next-in-line to be Prime. So, if you approve of Primus' choice in me, or simply if you believe in me and what I will do, then you must thank Drift for being there to ensure that my reign would come to pass."

Rodimus swept his gaze over the crowd, trying to not focus on the negative reactions, but still shaking regardless. He also tried to not think about how every single person in this crowd was hearing his voice broadcasted over the loudspeakers. While it was not the entirety of Cybertron, it certainly felt like it.

"I... we, that is, Megatronus and I, already gave him a funeral, but if you would indulge me, I would like to give him another moment of silence. In fact, I would like a full minute of silence to honour all of our fallen warriors, allies or enemies. They made the greatest sacrifice so that we may see a world free of the corrupt caste system. They have given us a choice to be whoever we choose to be. They are all heroes in my optics."

Rodimus took a step back from the podium, bowing his helm and shutting his optics. He heard some bots shuffling and then, silence. If he had been looking, he would see the masses before him with their own helms bowed, as they reflected on their dead loved ones.

He gave some thought to his few other friends. Most from Nyon, and perhaps they were not dead, but they were lost to the ravages of time, regardless. But for the most part, he thought about Drift. He allowed his spark to constrict and for the pain to radiate through his frame. Everything that he had tried so hard to hold back, he let run free. It hurt like nothing else, but he was glad to feel it. He hoped his sorrow would reach Drift in the Allspark, so that he would know how much he missed him, and how much he would continue to miss him in all of the days following.

As the minute came to a close, Rodimus wondered what the fallen warriors would think. Of him, of Megatronus, of what Cybertron became after the war. Was it everything they had hoped it would be? Everything they were fighting for? Or were they looking upon this celebration with scorn, *horrified* with what their planet had become? Well. As much as he wanted to honour the dead, he had to focus on the living. He had to do whatever he could to keep them living a healthy, happy life.

Some days the weight on his shoulders felt so immense that he thought he might collapse. Which was why he was eternally grateful to not be alone. Even then, when he had a moment of doubt, Megatronus was there with a hand on his shoulder.

"Well said," Megatronus murmured. "I know Drift is watching you proudly."

Rodimus gave a solemn nod as he took a step back and allowed Megatronus his chance to speak.

The crowd raised their helms again as Megatronus approached the podium. Long gone were the horrified gasps and whispers, though he still commanded a certain respect that Rodimus never quite achieved. He just had that air about him.

"I cannot help but feel responsible for Drift's death." He looked down at the podium, optics dim, then lifted his helm. "No. *I am* responsible for his death. I will not shy away from this fact, no matter how it pains me to admit. Rodimus may argue otherwise, but I know he realizes this, too. I molded him. I named him Deadlock, and I forged a new mech from him. I regret these actions, and

I regret that sending him down this road lead him to his death.

"I regret all of the deaths I have caused over this long war. I regret the mech I became in its waning days, but I do not regret its roots." He continued to speak over the gasps. "I will not claim to be this planet's saviour, nor a hero in any right, but the war was wholly necessary. A *revolution* was necessary. Our species cannot thrive as long as we categorize ourselves and say that some are better than others. Even now, I do not wish to be seen as better than anyone. Primus chose me, yes, but he chose me to lead, not to be put on a pedestal. A true leader will work *with* his people towards a better future. He will not issue orders he would not be willing to follow himself."

He gave pause to allow those words to sink in, and was thrilled to see both Decepticon and Autobot nodding in agreement.

"While Rodimus has taken the time to honour those fallen, I would like to recognize our veterans and those who are helping to rebuild. Whether that is those in construction, or the tireless work of psychiatrists assisting those who are having trouble adjusting to a time of peace. I am sure you all thought it would be such an easy transition once the final swords had fallen, but it is anything but. I am proud to stand here on this day and see how far we have come, and I know that in another year's time and every year to follow, my pride will only grow. Think of those past, and remember your history, but I also want you to enjoy the celebrations this evening to their fullest. *Relish* in the gift of life. Realize that you are lucky to be here. I know I will. For Primus has afforded me a second chance, and so have all of you. I want to thank you, and I will do all that I can to fix what I have broken."

The crowd applauded him, and no matter how many times he asked them not to, they drowned out his voice with more applause.

Rodimus came up beside Megatronus, touching his arm before he could ask again. "They look up to you," he said. "Especially your Decepticons. They still believe in you." Though they had both long since abandoned their badges, Rodimus still touched where Megatron's Decepticon symbol would have been. "My love, you have done so much work to see our veterans employed and our cities rebuilt. Can you not see that so much of this would not have been possible without you?" He gave him a sympathetic smile. "You can celebrate, too."

"But there is still so much we should do. So much that I *need* to do."

Rodimus was nodding before he'd finished speaking. "Yes, and you *just said* that we should still celebrate how far we have come. So celebrate with me. Tomorrow we will depart for Tarn and get right back to rebuilding, okay?"

Megatronus nodded, taking a hold of his hand. Together, they returned to the podium.

"I am sure you are all anxious to see what is under the tarp," Rodimus said. "I, for one, cannot wait to see the completed piece, so if we..." He looked off to the side, waiting for the approval from the crew, and when he got it, he turned back to the audience and, behind them, the statue. "If you would all turn your attention behind you..." He gestured to it, and after a few tense moments the ropes gave way and the tarp fluttered down around the base. And there he was.

Drift's statue stood peacefully, his arms out to either side as if welcoming an embrace, and his optics closed. His hips still housed his scabbards; empty. His swords lay at his pedes, symbolizing both sides laying down their arms. The plaque beneath it had a message that honoured all who had fallen and all who fought in the war.

While Rodimus smiled at the statue, his spark still ached to think of his fallen amica. "I wonder if

Drift would have liked it," he said. "It seems too... ostentatious for him." His gaze fell to his pedes.

Megatronus wrapped his arm around Rodimus' shoulder. "The Primes of past have had statues erected of *themselves*," he pointed out. "Perhaps it is not entirely selfless, but it is certainly less arrogant than that. I, for one, think it is a beautiful gesture, and you made sure that it would represent every innocent life slain, not just Drift's."

Rodimus looked at Megatronus and then back at the floor. "I guess."

"Anyone who would fault you for honouring your amica has already taken up arms against me. You have no more nor fewer enemies on this day." When Rodimus still did not lift his gaze, he added, "You continue to humble me, if that is any consolation."

"I just... want to be a good leader," Rodimus said.

"Being a good leader begins with being a good person, and you are, Rodimus. You are infinitely better than I, and I hope one day to emulate your leadership, or at least come close. You inspire me. You inspired me today, and you will inspire me tomorrow. You care so deeply for everyone that I cannot even imagine you acting against the best interests of your people."

"*Our* people," Rodimus reminded him, finally looking up.

Megatronus chuckled. "You see? You will not even see this leadership as your own."

"But it's not. Primus chose *us*, not just me. I could not do this without you."

Megatronus pressed a kiss to his forehead. "Even still, I would not fault you for seeing this as your reign alone, but you would never take all of the glory for yourself. It is not in your nature."

Rodimus watched as bots approached the statue, sharing somber stories with friends old and new. Some who had shed their factions, while others still proudly wore them. Autobot hugged Decepticon, mourning and reflecting, but smiling in the end, knowing their future would be bright.

"Cybertron will be okay, right?" Rodimus asked quietly.

Megatronus chuckled. He opted to hold Rodimus' hand, instead, and said, "With you leading? It's a guarantee."

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all the comments on this fic. I had so much fun writing it! I'm also pretty sure this is the first on-going fic I've EVER finished! There were times where I got super frustrated and thought about giving it up. It's certainly not my most liked or most popular fic, but I loved it.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!